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THE MEXICAN SETTING IN UNDER THE VOLCANO

by

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A THESIS

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled "The Mexican Setting in Under the Volcano" submitted by Edith Lorraine Baxter in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

The Mexican setting is important to Malcolm Lowry's novel Under the Volcano. From a careful knowledge of Mexico gained by living and studying there, Lowry selected certain features of the setting to weave into his novel. References to Mexican geography, history, and mythology are significant in terms of the novel's characters and theme. Small details including the physical features of the landscape, as well as the birds, animals, flowers, and insects are part of a complex pattern of symbols which conveys the meaning of the novel. Even certain figures and events of Mexican history function in the novel as symbolic representations of Lowry's tragic view of the condition of man. But Mexican mythology with its remnants in modern day Mexico offers the key to the heart of the novel. Out of age old myths developed a unique attitude toward death, a glorification of death or a hungering for extinction, which still influences the Mexican people and which offered the best answer to the novel's hero, Geoffrey Firmin, a man well aware of his position in time and the universe. Geoffrey Firmin becomes a sacrificial hero in the true spirit of Mexico, a spirit which comprehends the positive as well as the negative aspects of self-destruction. Mexico itself, as presented by Malcolm Lowry, is an important symbol to Geoffrey Firmin and to modern man.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Malcolm Lowry had more than the average tourist's knowledge and understanding of the Mexican landscape. The details of the Mexican setting which he utilizes in Under the Volcano show both his acute awareness of his own experiences during the years he lived there and his comprehension of the books he read about this unusual country.

In his "Preface to a Novel," Malcolm Lowry is correct when he says that "depths exist" in Under the Volcano although all are "not essential for the understanding of the book."[1] New depths of meaning can be added through a study of the setting. The Mexican setting is well suited to the story of a man's struggle and destruction. Mexico's unique geography, and its long and strange history and mythology, offered ready-made to Malcolm Lowry the ideal location for his story.

No one can travel even briefly in Mexico without becoming aware of first, the great diversity in the landscape, and second, the long history of conflict, as well as the influence of both upon the present generation of Mexicans. Mexico possesses all extremes in physical features and climate, and in all cases, forces its inhabitants into a severe struggle to maintain an existence, and this is evident even to the traveller who merely passes through. The presence of a great many ruins, churches, and museums throughout the country gives even the casual tourist some

knowledge of Mexican history and mythology. These facts may be obvious even to the armchair watcher of the television travelogue. But to Malcolm Lowry, the serious scholar of Mexico, there was greater wisdom to be derived from a study of its present and ancient cultures.

We know from Lowry's "Preface to a Novel" and from Under the Volcano itself, that Lowry studied at least two classical works on the history of Mexico. In his preface, he acknowledges Waldo Frank's work:

> . . . Mexico, the meeting place of many races, the ancient battleground of social and political conflicts where, as Waldo Frank, I believe, has shown, a colourful and talented people maintained a religion which was virtually a cult of death.[2]

This refers, it would seem, to the book America Hispana: A Portrait and a Prospect published in 1931, in which Waldo Frank explores extensively, in a chapter called "The Central Sea," the Mayan, Aztec, and Mexican cultures as well as the Mexican Revolution, mainly in terms of the theme of glory in individual death, which was begun in very early times and became the tragic inheritance of all descendants. In his acknowledgements to this book, Waldo Frank mentions another early Mexican historian:

> Finally, I give homage to my great predecessor in these realms: to the author of "The Conquest of Mexico" and "The Conquest of Peru"--William Hickling Prescott.[3]

William Hickling Prescott, whose History of the Conquest of Mexico was published in 1843, was another author thoroughly known by Malcolm Lowry. Within the text of Under the Volcano, Prescott is named by Hugh as a kind of authority on volcanic

earth, and in fact Hugh's statement is phrased in very Prescott-like language, as is shown in the following two quotations taken from Under the Volcano and The History of the Conquest of Mexico. Hugh thinks:

> Nothing but pines, fircones, stones, black earth. Yet that earth looked parched, those stones unmistakably volcanic. Everywhere, quite as Prescott informed one, were attestations to Popocatepetl's presence and antiquity.

The source for this in Prescott is:

> It exhibits now, indeed no vestige of a crater on its top, but abundant traces of volcanic action at its base, where acres of lava, blackened scoriae, and cinders proclaim the convulsions of nature, while numerous shrubs and mouldering trunks of enormous trees, among the crevices, attest the antiquity of these events.[5]

Similarly, in several other instances Lowry refers to events in Mexican history in terms which would indicate Prescott as his source. For example, Geoffrey speaks about Montezuma's zoo:

> "One always heard they had a therapeutic quality. They always had zoos in Mexico apparently--Moctezuma, courteous fellow, even showed stout Cortez around a zoo. The poor chap thought he was in the infernal regions" (p. 187).

Prescott, using one of his favorite sources, Bernal Diaz, a name which also occurs in Lowry's work, says in regard to Montezuma's zoo:

> They gazed on the spectacle with a vague curiosity not unmixed with awe, and, as they listened to the wild cries of the ferocious animals and the hissings, of the serpents, they almost fancied themselves in the infernal regions.[6]

These brief examples should serve to indicate that Lowry considered the Mexican background important enough to

his novel to research it diligently. The information he gained seems accurate according to his sources; he did not have to contrive or invent facts to suit the purposes of his theme. Rather he selected the details carefully and meticulously worked them into the fabric of his novel so that they function effectively as integral parts of the work.

Lowry seems to have been enormously convinced by Waldo Frank's analysis of the philosophy of the early Aztec peoples, because he adopts as the pervading tone of Under the Volcano the sense of life which, according to Frank, was prevalent among the Aztecs. Under the Volcano is filled with images of death, all of which help to create the violent and tragic atmosphere in which Geoffrey Firmin ultimately dies. This atmosphere of present day Mexico is convincingly traced back to early Aztec rites and beliefs by Frank. He sees the earth of Mexico and the nature of life itself as responsible for developing in the Aztec his strong desire for death. The "tyrant" earth of Mexico, that is, "an earth unwieldy to man's pleasure" made up of "titanic and volcanic mountains, mesetas of thin air, exuberant valleys and burning deserts" encouraged a culture "not smiling but extreme."[7] Thus the physical landscape of Mexico, combined with the pain of life as sensed in the fading flower and the drooping breasts of his beloved, caused the Aztec to seek death or "hunger for extinction."[8] Frank says that:

> He sought death or its counterfeit, forgetfulness, in life; getting drunk when he could, on liquor, on song, in endless dance, or with sexual passion.[9]

But of course the ultimate symbol for this sense of life was human sacrifice, and we know that the Aztecs practised this rite extravagantly because nearly every chronicler of Mexican history exclaims over the hundreds of thousands of skulls found in the temples of sacrifice. Their belief that this rite--the removal of the heart from its flesh by the knife of a priest--freed "life's kernel" from its "individual husk" or "personal shell" so that it might "issue into the timeless life of Nature,"[10] still manifests itself as part of the inheritance of a modern Mexican. According to Frank:

> No element of the old is lost in him. . . . The Mexican still goes to death, and gives it carelessly as he might stroke the strings of his guitar. He still submits, ravishing the delight of extinction from defeat.[11]

Malcolm Lowry found that he was able to capitalize on these two facets of the Mexican setting as described by Frank. First, he surrounded his characters by natural images derived from the Mexican "tyrant earth" especially the volcanoes, the barrancas, and the plant and animal life; then he developed extensively the Mexican attitude toward death through such typical events as the Day of the Dead, the funeral of the child, and the discovery of a corpse by the road. The result for the reader of Under the Volcano is a kind of transfer of values from the Mexican way of life onto the Geoffrey Firmin way of life. Or as Waldo Frank states it: a race "had learned to find life in personal destruction."[12] Perhaps this describes what Geoffrey Firmin learned about life too.

From his readings in Mexican history, chiefly in Prescott, and from his own experience and travels in Mexico, Lowry selected the minute details of setting which contribute to the creation of this pervading tone in Under the Volcano, a tone which he either derived directly from Waldo Frank, or a tone which he himself mutually felt or shared with Waldo Frank. From our scant knowledge of Lowry's personal life, it can be assumed that he would naturally be intrigued by the Aztec philosophy of life, particularly when stated as forcefully as Frank states it. That is, we know about some of Lowry's own beliefs through statements made by his personal friends, such as that by William McConnell in "Recollections of Malcolm Lowry."

> Later when we had doubled back up the hillside and through the evergreen forest, his fingers felt the new sharp green needles of the young hemlocks and he contemplatively dug with his toe at the dropped needles which had contributed to the forest loam. A deep observer, he believed nothing was or could be wasted in nature and that death itself was necessary for creation.[13]

Although this statement does not have the same dark quality as the tone of Under the Volcano, it is parallel to the Aztec belief in cycles of rebirth which infuses the novel. There is therefore, no mystery as to why Lowry was attracted to Frank, and to Mexico to provide the ideal tone and atmosphere for his novel. As he himself says in his preface, it is the "slow, melancholy, and tragic rhythm of Mexico itself" which provides "the ideal setting for the struggle of a human being against the powers of darkness and light."[14]

One task for the critic is to examine the details of

that setting to see how Lowry translates them into powerful symbols in a significant relationship to his characters, Geoffrey, Hugh, and Yvonne. It is my thesis that an analysis of even the most minute references to Mexican geography, history, or mythology will reveal that nothing is superfluous, rather that Lowry manipulated each detail carefully so that certain ones work together in developing patterns which serve to reveal character, comment ironically in certain situations, and exemplify a theme. The following chapters will provide that analysis in such a way that new depths to Under the Volcano will be opened through an area which is often overlooked in a novel. That area is the setting, in this case the Mexican setting.

II. GEOGRAPHY: THE PHYSICAL FEATURES

The geography of Mexico offered Malcolm Lowry a rich source of symbols. The general landscape with its peculiar natural land forms and features, and the unique climate of this land serve in Under the Volcano to create an atmosphere kindred to Lowry's characters and theme. Not all of the geographical references are of as major importance as the volcanoes, but each one contributes at least to the general atmosphere of danger, violence, and death. Throughout the novel there are many casual references to fields, roads, plains and of course, the ravine which is the most important of the minor geographical symbols.

The descriptions of these features inevitably show nature as what Waldo Frank would call "unwieldy" to the pleasures of man. For example, a simple picture like the following, conveys a great deal about what kind of men will survive here where the struggle for existence is so acute.

> Now the fields were full of stones: there was a row of dead trees (p. 9).

Stones, dead trees, and the dust, seen a while later, made by the buses whizzing "along the Mexican lake bed" (p. 11) indicate the lack of fertility in the land and in the imaginations of the people. Similarly, the road "which was terrible and full of potholes" and which went "steeply downhill" "approaching the little bridge over the barranca, the deep ravine" shows how little man has been able to tame the hostile forces of this land. This barren, desolate, and

rugged landscape which exists around Quauhnahuac is not so different in its effect on man from the desolate cactus plain which the Consul imagines "far from here" where their love wanders "lost, stumbling and falling, attacked by wild beasts" (p. 49). The desolate cactus plain is a part of Mexico too, and like the stones and dust represents just one of the extremes of the Mexican landscape. Another extreme is the tropical jungle caused by extreme conditions including the kind of rain which is experienced in Under the Volcano:

> A troughing wind all at once engulfed the street scattering old newspapers and blowing the naptha flares on the tortilla stands flat: there was a savage scribble of lightning over the hotel opposite the cinema, followed by another peal of thunder. . . . The rain was falling in torrents (p. 24).

The storm itself brings darkness, and the jungle it produces is also dark. Geoffrey's garden is the dark jungle in miniature, an image of desolate fecundity which contrasts with the many images of desolate sterility. The "chaos" of his garden and the "exuberance of the unclipped growth" are charmingly attractive to him (p. 128). The heavy sense of darkness and desolation evoked by descriptions of both extremes of climate and landscape are indeed reminiscent of the typical descriptions of Hell. The dryness and desolation of the sterile wasteland and the growth and strangulation of the fertile jungle are equally threatening powers of the Mexican landscape. The Consul writes about "night, and the nightly grapple with death" in this land saying:

> And this is how I sometimes think of myself, as

> a great explorer who has discovered some extraordinary land from which he can never return to give his knowledge to the world; but the name of this land is hell (p. 36).

The early Spanish explorers of Mexico encountered difficulties and a similar kind of death struggle as a result of the extreme land forms of Mexico. The ravine is one of these and it is described by Prescott, in a way which perfectly agrees with the present Cuernavaca, and in a way which was suggestive to Lowry. Prescott says

> the troops arrived before the strong city of Quauhnahuac, or Cuernavaca, as since called by the Spaniards. . . . The town was singularly situated on a projecting piece of land, encompassed by barrancas, or formidable ravines, except on one side, which opened on a rich and well cultivated country.[1]

He describes it further to indicate the great difficulty the Spanish faced in their attempt to cross it and attack the city.

> The Spaniards . . . found themselves separated from it by one of the vast barrancas before noticed, which resembled one of those frightful rents not unfrequent in the Mexican Andes, the result, no doubt, of some terrible convulsion in earlier ages. The rocky sides of the ravine sank perpendicularly down, so bare as scarcely to exhibit even a vestige of the cactus, or of the other hardy plants with which Nature in these fruitful regions so gracefully covers up her deformities. The bottom of the chasm, however, showed a striking contrast to this, being literally choked up with a rich and spontaneous vegetation; for the huge walls of rock which shut in these barrancas, while they screen them from the cold winds of the Cordilleras, reflect the rays of a vertical sun, so as to produce an almost suffocating heat in the enclosure, stimulating the soil to the rank fertility of the tierra caliente.[2]

The ravine, thus described and which actually exists, with a few deft touches by Lowry such as the allusions: "Dormitory

for vultures and city Moloch!" (p. 15) and "the Maleboge" (p. 100), is skilfully transformed into a meaningful symbol in the novel.

Daniel B. Dodson comments briefly on the significance of the barranca saying "it is the hell which both attracts and repels him, [Geoffrey] is finally his grave, and is symbolic of his separation from Yvonne."[1] Because Lowry wanted to emphasize the mysterious, black hell-like nature of the ravine, the descriptions of it are sparing. Only the top part of the ravine, that is the part which can be crossed on a bridge, exists at a literal level as a part of the real Mexican setting in the novel. The more important part, the depths of the ravine, exist only at a highly symbolic level because we can only follow Geoffrey up to the very edge of the ravine; we can not go with him. The reality in the thud of the final sentence, "Somebody threw a dead dog after him down the ravine" (p. 375), keeps us on that edge. Unlike the Prescott description of the ravine, the bottom can never be described. Although Lowry uses Prescott's idea of the bottom of the ravine being "choked up with a rich and spontaneous vegetation" in the Consul's interpretation of history, the bottom does not exist as a real and concrete object, but only as a symbolic comparison.

> Read history. Go back a thousand years. What is the use of interfering with its stupid course? Like a barranca, a ravine, choked up with refuse, that winds through the ages and peters out in a-- (p. 310).

Similarly from a point early in the novel we know that the

barranca represents the dark end because Laruelle thinks: "It was too dark to see the bottom, but here was finality indeed and cleavage! (p. 15). And from a later description of it "patiently creeping after them in the distance" (p. 237), we know that the end for them is near. Of all the physical features used in Under the Volcano, the barranca, because of what it represents in terms of Geoffrey's hell, must be the least real, the most symbolic, the least described, and the most mysterious of all.

Although the volcanoes are also of paramount importance in the creation of a mysterious atmosphere, and in the development of many symbolic levels, they have by contrast a more concrete existence in Under the Volcano because they are described profusely in the novel. The very real beauty of the mighty Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl never fails to impress all writers about Mexico. Commonly it is this aspect alone which is noted. Many however, do not neglect that other key element of a volcano's nature, its destructive power.

Prescott comments briefly upon each aspect, and Waldo Frank, of course, capitalizes only on the destructive element because it is such an appropriate symbol for his thesis regarding Mexican philosophy. Lowry develops and expands this beauty-and-destruction opposition in such a way that many other oppositions are also manifest. Richard Costa summarizes the many oppositions apparent in Lowry's use of the volcano as the book's "most insistent symbol" by saying:

that the volcano is "at once infernal and redemptive."[4] One of the ways Lowry achieves these oppositions is through reliance on Aztec myth as well as classical myth, and through an intimate relationship between the natural world and the human world.

The aura of beauty and magic surrounding the volcanoes, created particularly in the first parts of Under the Volcano, could be derivative, with many variations, from the simple description by Prescott:

> Nothing could be more grand than the view which met the eye from the area on the truncated summit of the pyramid. Towards the west stretched that bold barrier of porphyritic rock which nature has reared around the valley of Mexico, with huge Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl standing like two colossal sentinels to guard the entrance to the enchanted region. . . . volcanoes higher than the highest mountain-peak in Europe, and shrouded in snows which never melt under the fierce sun of the tropics. . . . Such was the magnificent prospect which met the gaze of the Conquerors and may still, with slight change, meet that of the modern traveller . . .[5]

The hint of destruction in Prescott's later sentence:

> The view reached in an unbroken line to the very base of the circular range of mountains, whose frosty peaks glittered as if touched with fire in the morning ray; while long, dark wreaths of vapour, rolling up from the hoary head of Popocatepetl, told that the destroying element, was, indeed at work in the bosom of the beautiful valley,[6]

is extended by Frank and translated into an enormous environmental influence upon the lives of the inhabitants. Frank says:

> In most parts of Mexico, the mountains are volcanoes, live or dead; and every Mexican breathes a subterranean fire which must someday break from its shell and destroy him.[7]

This is the aspect which Lowry develops gradually, beginning simply with the black clouds as ominous threats and building to a climax where not only the volcano erupts but indeed the whole world erupts in an image of mass destruction.

The general air of mystery developed throughout the novel is captured in essence by the feeling in the poem "Romance" by W.J. Turner, which is said to be a favorite of the Consul and which is misquoted by him at one point (p. 64). The dreamlike nature of the poem, about a thirteen year old boy who is spellbound by the magic of volcanoes, is also a part of Under the Volcano. The same strange power of Popocatepetl that causes the poet to say "They had stolen my soul away,"[8] is evident in its power of attraction especially over the Consul. The magnetic charm indicated in: "Popocatepetl came in view, an apparition already circling away, that beckoned them forward" (p. 237), is similar to the charm over the poet. In the poem, the mysterious power seems associated with the magical beauty, but in the case of the Consul, the attraction is more likely to be the destructive element.

Bound up with the beauty and destruction opposition as part of the mysterious quality of the volcano are certain other oppositions such as the known versus the unknown. Certain mysteries of the universe can never be known to man, and these are perfectly symbolized by the volcano. Although the volcanoes are often described as "clear and magnificent" (p. 5) or calm and peaceful, there is eternally that hovering puff of smoke (p. 207), or the dark gathering clouds (p. 279),

and more particularly throughout the whole region "from above, below, from the sky, and, it might be, from under the earth . . . a continual sound of whistling, gnawing, rattling, even trumpeting" (p. 140). According to Prescott, a classic fable of antiquity describes the unknown of the volcano as "the abode of the departed spirits of wicked rulers, whose fiery agonies in their prison-house caused the fearful bellowings and convulsions."9 The big question of the unknown is always present to disturb the seemingly calm and peaceful appearance of what can be seen. The greatest unknown to man is of course death and Lowry places Geoffrey's death right in the spot where the ancients placed Tartarus or Hell, under the volcano, a region totally unplumbed by man. Even modern science has only been able to probe a very thin layer of the earth's crust, a small distance in comparison with the four thousand or so miles to the earth's center, that vast region of the unknown.

Besides the general atmosphere of mystery, and the implicit oppositions between beauty and terror, calm and destruction, the known and the unknown, created by each reference to the volcanoes, there is also a specific and particular significance of the volcanoes developed for each of the characters. Generally it might be said that volcanoes represent the distant past for all humanity, since the age of volcanoes occurred in a very early stage of the earth's development. Laruelle, Geoffrey, and Yvonne each project their own pasts, sorrowful, tragic, and burdensome, upon

the vast solidity of the mountains. It is as if the secrets and weight of one's past are buried under the weight of the mountains. This sense is most explicit with M. Laruelle who

> could feel their burden [his past sorrows] pressing upon him from outside, as if somehow it had been transferred to these purple mountains all around him, so mysterious with their secret mines of silver, so withdrawn, yet so close, so still, and from these mountains emanated a strange melancholy force that tried to hold him there bodily, which was its weight, the weight of many things but mostly that of sorrow (p. 13).

Geoffrey's tragic past is buried in India in the Himalayas, but the Mexican volcanoes remind him more often than he cares to remember of how his father went off into the mountains and left him as a child. The mountains are different, but alike enough to be a tragic reminder to Geoffrey of the weight of the past. Geoffrey consciously projects his burdens upon the volcanoes while talking to Dr. Vigil when he lifts his face toward them and feels his desolation go out to those heights (p. 144). The description of the dead lava there, "a soulless petrified residue of extinct plasm in which even the wildest and loneliest trees would never take root" (p. 144), matches the nature of the Consul's own soul. Geoffrey buries his dismal present in the mountains but they remain as a constant reminder to him.

Yvonne's past is in the volcanoes of Hawaii, but they are related to the Mexican volcanoes by virtue of the fact that Popo and Ixta are "remote ambassadors of Mauna Loa, Mokuaweoweo" (p. 58). Mokuaweoweo is the very active summit crater of Mauna Loa, "an immense lava dome" in Hawaii

"not only the largest active volcano in the world, but in actual volume the largest mountain in the world."[10] Since it discharges more lava than any other volcano, it is called "The Monarch of Modern Volcanoes," a title which well qualifies it to have remote ambassadors in Mexico. For Yvonne, the past was glorious and so because "she'd had volcanoes in her life before" (p. 53) she thinks of Popo and Ixta as "her volcanoes, her beautiful beautiful volcanoes" (p. 44). Although her past was as beautiful as the volcanoes, in a way that even causes her to think of a pleasant moment with the Consul as one of a "mountain peace" (p. 64), it is also as burdensome as the weight of the mountain, in that she was never able to attain again the achievement of her childhood career, and she was left with many things upon her conscience which she could not discuss even with her husband. For Yvonne, as well as for Geoffrey and Laruelle, the volcanic mountains contain the buried secrets of the past, a past which weighs upon the present with a formidable weight comparable to and as ever present as the volcanoes of Mexico.

The characters in the novel are also related to the mountains through an association between the lovers of the novel and the lovers of legend, Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl.[11] Because we are interested in the state of the marriage between Geoffrey and Yvonne from a point early in the plot, the first reference to "Ixtaccihuatl and Popocatepetl, that image of the perfect marriage" (p. 93), becomes an image of the ideal marriage. There are further references to the

dual sexual nature of the mountains such as: "Popocatepetl loomed pyramidal, to their right, one side beautifully curved as a woman's breast the other precipitous, jagged, ferocious" (p. 240), which imply an immediate comparison with Yvonne and Geoffrey. The adjectives describing the male side are particularly apt considering the dangerously destructive personality of Geoffrey. The association between Geoffrey and the chief volcano is further strengthened by Yvonne's fascination with Popocatepetl and her obvious happiness when it springs into view (p. 233), as well as her desperate attempt to reflect the two volcanoes together in her compact mirror, but the association is most evident when Yvonne recounts the tragic Indian legend near the end (p. 317). In the legend, Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl could not find each other until their tragic death when they became united forever as the sleeping woman and her eternal guard. Throughout Under the Volcano, Yvonne and Geoffrey strive vainly to find each other, recalling their past when their separation was the same. Like "La Despedida," the photographic enlargement of the disintegration of a glacial deposit, another mountain image, they are curiously and sadly split (p. 54). In terms of the Indian legend and in terms of the Aztec philosophy of life and death so vigorously propounded in Under the Volcano, the only union possible is not in this world but in the world after death. And death is imminent for them in visions like the "jagged angles of blood red snow" (p. 317) on the summit of Ixtaccihuatl.

As physical objects then, the two mountains actually exist as a part of the Mexican landscape, and because of their characteristic shapes they have long been likened to the male and female. Physically the association between the volcanoes and his characters was a simple and obvious one for Lowry and it enabled him to reveal character through the novel aspect of setting. With the added richness of the Mexican legend just barely subliminal to the surface feature, Lowry could also further strengthen his theme through this same aspect of the setting. The mountains are part of the whole spirit of Mexico, a strangely potent force developed by Mexicans over the centuries and used thematically by Lowry in his novel. The answer to Sigbjørn's questions in La Mordida, Lowry's later novel, is clear in Under the Volcano, especially clear to Geoffrey Firmin.

> What was Mexico? What did Mexico mean? Why was the thought they could not return so terrible?[12]

Mexico is death. The mountains represent that death--death which is man in a state of unity--a state which is not possible in life but only in death.

As an extension of Lowry's treatment of the volcano as a symbol of important oppositions, there is in addition to this association of the mountains with death, a key link between the mountains and life, giving the life-death contrast. Because the awe inspiring and spectacular volcano is still a natural phenomenon inexplicable to man, it serves as an ideal symbol for life itself. Even the field of science can offer only theories that attempt to explain the causes

of volcanism. Hugh offers several theories but ends with only an eruption, and no explanation, that is, just as in life "the whole thing was a complete mystery still" (p. 238). Under the Volcano vividly presents life as a mystery, asks questions about its meaning, and offers a possible solution, a solution developed by the primitive peoples of Mexico.

Related to the idea that life is a volcano, is the similar idea that life is a mountain or a series of peaks. There are plans throughout the novel to climb Popocatepetl and the vision of this keeps recurring to Geoffrey. Geoffrey wonders if Hugh's notion of "climbing the volcano had somehow struck them as having the significance of a lifetime together?" And he draws the analogy clearly: "Yes, there it rose up before them, with all its hidden dangers, pitfalls, ambiguities, deceptions, portentous as what they could imagine for the poor brief self-deceived space of a cigarette was their own destiny" (p. 290). In his final moments, Geoffrey imagines that Hugh and Yvonne are climbing Popocatepetl and beyond, and when he looks for his own peaks, that he has climbed throughout life, he sees nothing. As a comment on life, his vision at the moment of death is a thematic statement showing the importance of life through its similarity to a volcano:

> no peaks, no life, no climb. Nor was this summit a summit exactly: it had no substance, no firm base. It was crumbling too . . . (p. 375).

A volcano can erupt at any time and in its destruction is seen the utter futility of its prior existence. So, is the life of a man.

FLORA AND FAUNA

Even the flora and fauna produced by the diverse Mexican landscape were useful to Lowry in writing his novel. From the rich and varied natural source which he knew intimately, he selected certain flowers, birds, animals, and insects which would serve the purposes of his novel best. These features which he names and describes accurately in Under the Volcano, both recreate literally the Mexican landscape and create symbolically an attachment between the natural and human worlds. They are significant to atmosphere, character, and theme too.

Part of Lowry's success in this area is due to his knowledge of, and intense interest in the natural world around him. From his letters can be gleaned some key statements emphasizing his regard for the natural world and his attitude toward symbolic interpretation of it. Hilda Thomas in examining his letters, quotes Lowry and comments:

> "Life is a forest of symbols," he wrote to Erskine in 1946. And Lowry was attentive to every tree along his forest path.[1]

She further exemplifies this with a quotation from Lowry's letter to David Markson written only a few days before he died:

> Do you know which stars are which and what bird is flying over your head and what flower blossoming? If you don't the anguish of not knowing is a very valid field for the artist. Moreover when you learn something it's a good thing to repossess the position of your original ignorance.[2]

Flowers, thousands of varieties of flowers, have always been a dominant part of the Mexican landscape and since early

times have exerted an important influence on the Mexican peoples. Many writers about Mexico have noted both the abundance of flowers and the significance attached to them by the native peoples. Two of Lowry's sources illustrate this. For example, Prescott says

> All these commodities, and every stall and portico, were set out, or rather smothered, with flowers, showing--on a much greater scale, indeed--a taste similar to that displayed in the markets of modern Mexico. Flowers seem to be the spontaneous growth of this luxuriant soil, which, instead of noxious weeds, as in other regions, is ever ready, without the aid of man, to cover up its nakedness with this rich and variegated livery of Nature.[3]

Waldo Frank interprets the Mexican's love of flowers and traces the tragic significance of the flower back to an origin in the early Aztec ritual of human sacrifice. In order to obtain victims for sacrifice, wars were waged against neighboring tribes. Frank says

> These battles for living victims were known as the "flowered wars," and in the name's marriage of blood and bloom is the key to the terrible genius of the Aztec. Aztec art was not so profound as that of Toltec or Maya, but it was perfect. Its aim was the limit of virtuousity. Always the hardest gems were cut, always the smallest surfaces were carved. For the Aztec sense of beauty was not separate from the painful, the fragile, the unattainable. The flower was its symbol. The Flower's fairness, complete and doomed, merged in their minds with the finality of the blood that gushes from a human heart. When the dark stream flowed, they saw a mystic blossom rising from it.[4]

Similarly, Lewis Spence in <u>The Myths of Mexico and Peru</u> describes a sacrificial stone in the National Museum of Mexico which is

> circular in form, on which are shown in sculpture a series of groups representing Mexican warriors receiving the submission of war captives. The

> prisoner tenders a flower to his captor, symbolical of the life he is about to offer up, for lives were the "flowers" offered to the gods, and the campaign in which these "blossoms" were captured was called Xochiyayotl (The War of Flowers).[5]

Frank sees this attitude or value as a prevalent one even in modern times. About the modern Mexican he says

> He still loves the tragic symbol of the flower. In the modern villages, the huts, smoke-grimed and squalid, have a single blossom, rose or gardenia, on the table. Countless women go forth with a penny to buy bread, and the bread is not bought, the penny purchases a flower which dies on the church altar--Huitzilopochtli [Aztec god of war, death, and sacrifice] masked in a cathedral.[6]

For a novel of tragedy, it is appropriate, at least in Frank's terms, that Lowry should have used flower imagery throughout to contribute to the pervading tone of tragedy. Sealed within the very beauty of the flower are the seeds of its own destruction. Even more particularly, in the Mexican setting, flowers are a major part of the beautiful but inhuman jungle of the natural world which gradually overtakes and consumes man and his works. Blatant evidence of this phenomenon is in the many ruins of ancient architecture predating the Aztecs which lay hidden for many generations because of luxuriantly dense jungle growth.

Even more than their contribution to the general atmosphere of beauty and destruction however, the flower images are specific and associated with specific characters. Lowry knew well the special characteristics of each flower that he chose and was thus able to align certain ones with definite characters. The flowers he chose are not commonly known to the ordinary English speaking world and yet they are

extremely well-known to anyone familiar with the Mexican landscape. By choosing flowers such as the bougainvillea, plantain, and convulvulus rather than the conventional flowers of literature such as the rose and the lily, he avoids the creation of typically stylized symbols in favor of some fresh and marvellously potent symbols.

The most recurrent flower image is the bougainvillea. A description of the bougainvillea taken from a book called Meet Flora Mexicana will elucidate some of the reasons why Lowry chose the bougainvillea to be used the most extensively and why especially he always associated the bougainvillea with Yvonne.

> Even if you wanted to (which you certainly don't), you could not get away from the flamboyant bougainvillea. Their flowers pursue you in patios, on fences and walls, along highways, in parks, and even in woody areas where they have acclimated themselves--different in color but always gorgeous, easily recognized by the "flowers" decorating the vine at almost any time of the year--flowers that are not really flowers but colorful bracts around them.[7]

This quality of creeping "every-where-ness" is important to the Under the Volcano atmosphere of the beautiful but inhuman jungle. In all references, the banks of bougainvillea are covering up or hiding something either man-made or natural. This smothering effect is noted by Yvonne as she approaches her former home where the bougainvillea conceals the walls, the broken gate, and some steps. In these three instances the descriptions of the "massive smouldering banks of bloom" (p. 63), the "defiantly half-hidden [gate] under the bank of bougainvillea" (p. 64), and the "stubborn branch of bougain-

villea blocking some steps he hadn't noticed before" (p. 96), all convey the sense of the suppressed unknown being held in check. The images parallel those of the volcanoes which sit atop unfathomed depths of the unknown. Other images of the bougainvillea even more closely related to the theme of suppression are those which show the bougainvillea secreting all forms of violent danger. The bougainvillea is said to be covered with "spikes" and "spiders" (p. 374) which represent an immediate physical danger and it is also said to house two "vanished" lizards which represent as well as immediate danger, the archetypal danger of evil itself.

More significant however, is the fact that the bougainvillea is always associated with Yvonne. That Lowry consciously developed the bougainvillea as Yvonne's flower can be seen in a change between the "First Novel Version (B)" and the final published form. In the early manuscript Lowry wrote

> "Can you pick bougainvillea?" he heard Yvonne say, and "Be careful," replied Hugh, "It's got spikes on it and you have to look at everything to be sure there's no spiders."[8]

However, in the final form it is Hugh who asks the question and Yvonne who, because it is her flower, offers up her knowledge. The parts of the description from the floral guidebook which seem particularly relevant here in the relationship between Yvonne and the bougainvillea are "flamboyant," "always gorgeous," and "easily recognized by the 'flowers' decorating the vine at almost any time of the year--flowers that are not really flowers but colorful bracts around them." The showiness and superficiality of

Yvonne's character are pointed out in the flamboyantly gorgeous nature of her flower and most significantly of all, the bougainvillea is not a flower at all, just as Yvonne is incomplete in her relationship with Geoffrey in that she has never reached the flower of her womanhood or produced a child for him. Her life with Geoffrey is just as empty as the bract on a bougainvillea vine; not only has she been unable to bear Geoffrey a child but her own life seems sterile and she lacks the perception and understanding which might fulfill herself and Geoffrey. Many other images from the natural world illustrate directly the superficiality and sterility of Yvonne, such as her association with the bright red cardinal, a bird which has no really distinctive features but which is well-known for its lovely coloring and pleasant song.

The flower most closely associated with Geoffrey is the plantain. The description of the flower given in Meet Flora Mexicana matches closely the observation made by Geoffrey. The guide book says

> Its red and orange flowers are in a very large, scarlet and black blossom sheath, with boat shaped parts. The total effect is both bizarre and beautiful.9

In addition it tells us an interesting characteristic of the plantain, that is, once the plant fruits it dies. Geoffrey sees the plantains with "their queer familiar blooms, once emblematic of life, now of an evil phallic death" (p. 65), and later he observes the "superb plantains flowering so fatally and obscenely" (p. 127). It is appropriate that

Geoffrey, the character in the novel most obsessed with sexual fantasies of various sorts, should see the phallic resemblances in the plantain. It is Geoffrey who attempts to make love to his wife, who is caught subsequently in the garden with his fly open, and who has intercourse with the Mexican prostitute in the final scene. It is also Geoffrey who in various states of sexual jealousy accuses Hugh of being a snake in the grass, suspects Laruelle of betraying him in the very room in which they visit, blames Yvonne for destroying his children "to the accompaniment of the rattling of a thousand douche bags" (p. 313), and openly charges Hugh and Yvonne with "playing bubbies and titties" all that day (p. 313). None of the other characters seems as conscious of sexuality as Geoffrey; in fact, it is only through his consciousness that the sexual content of the story is revealed. Even though the most inner thoughts of Yvonne, Hugh, and Laruelle are revealed, at no time is there an open admission or confession of a sexual affair which confirms Geoffrey's suspicions. Geoffrey's phallic interests are strengthened by his association with the plantain with its bizarre but beautiful scarlet and black blossom sheath with boat-shaped parts.

Of course the other characteristic of the plantain which is relevant to Geoffrey is its property of dying after fruiting. In Geoffrey Firmin's mad rush toward death, the plantain, even more than most other flowers which must all die following the height of their blossoming, is the perfect symbol for a tragically complete death. Certain other

flowers which Geoffrey chooses to show interest in are also symbolic of death in other ways. As Geoffrey approaches near to death, he notes some unnamed scarlet flowers along the path which are characteristically turned into "flaming swords" by the "blinding torrent of sunlight" (p. 287). Flowers associated with Geoffrey are often phallic images, and always symbols of death.

Hugh's flower is the convulvulus which is a kind of vine which creeps and climbs everywhere using other plants as a support. Walter Pesman describes the convulvulus in a way which seems descriptive of Hugh's activities in relation to Geoffrey and Yvonne. Of the convulvulus he says: "Climbing among trees it might easily be mistaken for the trees themselves."[10] From Geoffrey's point of view surely, Hugh is like a convulvulus in that he has climbed into his brother's position, completely betrayed him, and substituted himself in the position of the original. From another point of view, Hugh, who twice observes the tall thick hedges twined with convulvulus (p. 110) and the leafy hedges full of wild flowers (p. 236), also requires a tall thick leafy hedge over which to spread his ideas of social reform. He is unable to stand on his own when faced with human issues like the Spanish War; his ideas are there, thick and beautiful like convulvulus flowers, but lacking the support of any strong action of his own.

Just as Geoffrey notes the plantain twice and thus identifies himself with it, so Hugh twice identifies the

convulvulus and associates himself unconsciously with its creeping vine-like qualities. With this, as well as Hugh's obvious connections with serpents, it is certain that Lowry draws an analogy between Hugh and the vine in Yvonne's comment: "My God, this used to be a beautiful garden. It was like Paradise," spoken as she gazed "down at a flowerbed that was completely, grossly strangled by a coarse green vine" (p. 98).

Hugh himself makes a conscious association between Geoffrey and "some blue wildflowers like forget-me-nots that had somehow found a place to grow between the sleepers on the track" (p. 116). In the midst of a discussion about Geoffrey's drinking problem he thinks: "These innocents had their problem too: what is this frightful dark sun that roars and strikes at our eyelids every few minutes?" thus seemingly drawing a parallel between Geoffrey's problem and the problem of the flowers. Yet the analogy would seem to suit his own problem more closely, and from his own perspective at that. He is the little innocent trapped between the two sleepers (notice the parallel with the two great sleeping mountains which are obviously associated with Geoffrey and Yvonne) in a dangerous position where he suffers pangs of guilt which sweep over him like the dark train because of his betrayal and separation of his brother and wife.

Other forms of vegetation besides these distinctive flowers are referred to throughout Under the Volcano for the creation of an overall violently inhuman atmosphere.

Waldo Frank speaks of the "ruthlessly dynamic and devouring nature" of a tropic culture.

> Vegetation, insects, the sun, the fury of the winds that tempered the hot world--all were extremes. Man was in constant touch with violences, any one of which could kill him. Even the trees were ready to march upon his mansions, split his exquisite carvings and crumble his altars. To survive, the Maya must keep calm in the ravening vortex.[11]

Lowry successfully evokes this same atmosphere through references to the creeping varieties of plants as well as descriptions of the larger more powerful types of vegetation. For example, the candelabra cactus are made into powerful forces when they are described as "brutal-looking" (p. 239), and their power increases to a maximum pitch in one of the final scenes where they are described as "salt grey where the flashlight caught them, too stiff and fleshy to be bending with the wind, in a slow multitudinous heaving, an inhuman cackling of scales and spines" (p. 331). The strength and the power of the natural world is manifest in Lowry's descriptions, and so is its endurance. Man and his phases of civilization pass away but the vegetation remains. Under the Volcano evokes this feeling with its descriptions like:

> . . . immense trees not quite familiar enough for oaks, not quite strangely tropical either, which were perhaps not really very old, but possessed an indefinable air of being immemorial, of having been planted centuries ago by some emperor, at least, with a golden trowel (p. 112).

In the same way that descriptions of flowers and plants contribute to the general atmosphere of the novel and also help to define particular aspects of character and theme, so

function the birds which appear in Under the Volcano. The most dominant bird is of course the ever present vulture which constantly soars along the Mexican skyline waiting for its special moment of descent--a most significant moment in terms of Under the Volcano. The eagle is another important bird symbol--important to the Mexican from earliest times and important also to the theme of Under the Volcano.

But Lowry's knowledge of the birdlife of Mexico served him at an even more complex level than this in the writing of his novel. That is, certain birds are associated because of their distinctive features, with the main characters. For example, the little dispute over the cardinal and the trogon between Geoffrey and Yvonne serves to do more than just indicate that for them differences exist in both major and trivial things to cause tremendous tensions in all cases. The argument over the cardinal and the trogon also focuses on the habits of the two birds and thus identifies the cardinal with Yvonne and the trogon with Geoffrey. The identification is skilful and unobtrusive and handled in a manner that allows in addition, one of the book's valuable moments of intellectual humor.

Of the thousand different kinds of birds in Mexico, it is interesting that Lowry should choose one common bird and one exotic bird. The cardinal is more commonly known because it is found throughout a large portion of North and South America. The trogon, however, locates only in tropical rain forests which gives it a more limited field in America. This fact alone is significant in the association of the birds with

Geoffrey and Yvonne. Yvonne is the more common or more nearly average kind of human being, while Geoffrey is surely an exceptional individual. One would not find many Geoffrey Firmins in the world. He is a special kind of individual and like the trogon has many unique features in comparison with the rest of the world. According to Birds of the World by Hans Hvass, one of the differences of the trogon is:

> They differ from other birds in having both the inner toe and the back toe--that is toes number one and two--turning backwards.12

This distinction seems significant in relation to Geoffrey when we remember that he did have a lame walk (p. 52), and when we note that trogons are "slow, sluggish birds and fly poorly,"13 and that they are "dependent on their wings for procuring food as their legs are small and weak and unfit for walking."14 Surely Geoffrey compares in that he does not move through life in quite the customary manner, just as the trogon does not walk or fly in the ordinary way. A further comparison, and one that Geoffrey draws himself, is the likeness in their living habits. Of the trogon, Geoffrey says: "He's a solitary fellow who probably lives way off in the Canyon of the Wolves over there, away off from those other fellows with ideas, so that he can meditate about not being a cardinal" (p. 74). The association is subtle and humorous--much more so than in the "First Novel Version" where Lowry wrote explicitly:

> No said the Consul lighting his pipe and feeling that at any moment he might put out wings and go soaring away over the valley with the seven-year locusts, or the coppery tailed trogon, that

> ambiguous ambiguous bird, over towards the Canyon of the Wolves.[15]

Geoffrey is a solitary, meditative fellow much apart from the masses, the kind to be seen "singly or in pairs, but never in flocks."[16] His remarkable self-awareness and understanding of his role in the universal scheme of things isolates him from the crowds. Only a select few men ever dare to follow their convictions as Geoffrey Firmin does when the choice involved is one between life and death.

In contrast to the trogon, the cardinal, often called in fact the "Common Cardinal," flies about in flocks and only pairs off during the spring and summer. Their remarkably fine singing and bright red feathers make them extremely showy and hence well-known. The association between the cardinal and Yvonne is clear, especially when we recall the commonness and showiness of the bougainvillea also, even though Lowry does not spell it out so clearly in the published version of the novel as in the "First Novel Version" where he says:

> She put on her hat again . . . peeking at herself with her head first on one side, then on the other, like a red bird.[17]

Yvonne is a follower, incapable of making the kind of choice which could alter her own destiny.

The vulture, the ugly carrion eater conventionally associated with death, appears many times throughout Under the Volcano. The feeling of his constant presence is achieved through frequent references coming from the different view points of each of the three main characters, and although

he thus hovers as a kind of ominous foreshadowing over the whole story, the symbolic import he attains differs from the conventional. From classical times when Prometheus was sentenced to having his liver consumed daily by the vulture, the vulture has traditionally been seen in a disreputable light. In Under the Volcano, however, the majority of the descriptions of the vulture show him as a creature of great beauty. Only when the vulture descends to earth and appears in a kind of camera close-up in Lowry's writing do we see his characteristic and threatening ugliness. That is, only Hugh's vision of an "occasional huddled conclave of vultures up a tree" (p. 111), Geoffrey's memory of the "vulture sitting in the washbasin" (p. 349), and Yvonne's thoughts of the vultures "that on earth so jealously contend with one another defiling themselves with blood and filth" (p. 317) appear in the novel to represent this aspect of the vulture. By contrast, when the birds fly, they are "sleepy vultures high overhead" (p. 7), or "vultures floating lazily up there above the brick red horizon" (p. 44), or "enormously high . . . more graceful than eagles . . . like burnt papers floating from a fire" (p. 93), or "effortlessly" beautiful "in the blue sky above them" (p. 253), or "sailing up there, ascending higher and higher . . . above the storms to heights shared only by the condor, above the summit of the Andes" (p. 317)--sights altogether beautiful to spectators on the ground. The vulture is the embodiment of Geoffrey's view of death; both the repulsive and the attractive are represented. The flight

is the transcendence of man's bodiless soul to heights of the unknown beautiful. One of the final references in the novel clarifies this aspect: Yvonne sees just before her death "high above them, at a vast height, bodiless black birds, more like skeletons of birds" (p. 323). Certainly this whole concept recalls again the Aztec philosophy in regard to the ritual sacrifice. Only when the heart was removed brutally from the burden of its body did it become truly free--that is, as Waldo Frank states it: "release[d] into the real world which he beheld in the impersonal air and the impersonal mountains."[18] The vulture is a symbol of this release in Under the Volcano.

To the Aztecs, the symbol of this release was the eagle, a close family relative of the vulture and of similar habits. According to legend the Aztec center was established in the spot where an eagle was seen devouring a serpent. According to Frank, the Aztecs gradually came to enact their symbol, that is, he says:

> The eagle is violent death: his home is in the ice and fire of the crater, and he swoops down to Anahuac only for victims. Gradually, the Aztec nation, the Mexica, were to enact this symbol of their legend in the life of the land. The sunlight of Anahuac was to darken into blood.[19]

The eagle is present in Under the Volcano too--present near the end to presage the violent deaths of Yvonne and Geoffrey. But the deaths will be in the Aztec spirit because the release of the small caged eagle by Yvonne is like the release of a soul described by Frank, or the flight of the vulture earlier described by Lowry--"it knew it was free--up soaring,

with a sudden cleaving of pinions into the deep dark blue pure sky above" (p. 320).

Just as Lowry chose the eagle or vulture with its long Mexican history of tragic connotations as a major symbol for his novel, so he worked in other creatures from the Mexican animal world which have increased potency because of their significance in Aztec legend. The dog, the horse, and the serpent were all important in the Aztec culture. Each had a symbolic importance which Lowry used and extended in his novel, as he associated each one with a particular character.

The animal most closely associated with Geoffrey is the dog. In the early pages of the novel he is constantly shadowed by the hideous pariah dogs of the town and the very last we hear of him is that "somebody threw a dead dog after him down the ravine" (p. 375). Daniel B. Dodson notes the association between Geoffrey and the dog and comments briefly on what he sees as a "dual reference" of the dog:

> one, a relation to the satanic black poodle which follows Goethe's Faust, and two, the symbol of the totally abject humility which though he aspires fervently toward it, is forever inaccessible to the Consul.[20]

He concludes that "at the day's end . . . the Consul and the dog are joined not in heaven but in hell."[21] When the Mexican significance of the dog is considered, Dodson's conclusion is inadequate, because the dog also has divine associations.

The dog is Geoffrey's protector, for traditionally in Mexico a dog is useful in guiding the soul across the river after death. The dog's spiritual significance to the Aztec

is manifest in the hundreds of ancient Mexican tombs which have been found to contain "a clay model of a smooth plump dog with pricked up ears and a laughing expression."[22] Geoffrey's dogs hardly compare with these models, since his are always pariahs, hideous and starving. His death is however, foreshadowed by their presence, and his union with all other lonely and exiled creatures is demonstrated through them. Especially moving is the scene at Señora Gregorio's where Geoffrey talks to the most degenerate dog of all--the one which had the "appearance of having lately been skinned," the one which "thrusting down its poor wrecked dinghy of a chest, from which raw withered breasts drooped," "began to bow and scrape before him" (p. 228). Geoffrey's kind words to the dog are surely given in recognition of the common suffering which all living creatures must endure in life, for a short time later he becomes projected into the opposite role in search of compassion himself from Señora Gregorio whom he wants to embrace as a child does a mother. Neither the dog nor Geoffrey can be happy in this life, but in Aztec terms since they die in the preferred way they will go directly to a special kind of heaven. The Aztecs believed in Nine Regions of the Land of the Dead, and that persons "dying in battle, by sacrifice, through drowning, or in childbirth"[23] attained the best region. Geoffrey's death is noble because he dies in battle and it is also a sacrificial death.

Another animal common in Mexico which has certain

connections with Geoffrey is the armadillo. The association is rather indirect and is made through Hugh and Yvonne's debate over the armadillo. First of all, Yvonne has a strange attraction for the armadillo, an inexplicable attraction much the same as her feeling for her husband. Secondly, Hugh dissuades her from purchasing the armadillo for a pet, reminiscent of his power over her in his seduction and betrayal of Geoffrey. And thirdly, one of the armadillo's main character traits reminds one of Geoffrey. According to Wildlife of Mexico, the peculiar attributes of the armadillo are its external armour and its ability to dig. "When attacked by a predator an armadillo will try to reach the safety of a burrow."[24] Hugh is aware of the nature of the armadillo and delivers the strangely charged statement:

> "It'll not only never come back, Yvonne, but if you try to stop it it will do its damndest to pull you down the hole too" (p. 113).

A pregnant statement descriptive of the direction of Geoffrey's movement and the fate of those who interfere too.

Another animal which plays a most important role in Under the Volcano is the horse. Critics have often commented upon the role of the horse in terms which do not consider the Mexican background of the horse, but in ways which are nevertheless consistent with an interpretation based on a knowledge of the history of the horse in the new world. For example, Perle Epstein's view of the wild horse as a vision of "Chavayah" or "God's destructive power unleashed"[25] and Daniel B. Dodson's view of the "apocalyptic horse of death"[26]

can only be strengthened by considering the distinctively Mexican character of the horse. Well known to the North American world today, the horse was not always so, and it is important to remember that the horse was not introduced to this part of the world until Cortes brought the first horse to Mexico. Thus, viewed in historical terms, the horse could be seen as quite distinctive to the Mexican setting.

Lowry may have been impressed by Prescott's descriptions of the first horses and their effect upon the Aztecs. At least knowing the symbolic import attached to the horse by the Aztecs seems to elucidate somewhat Lowry's use of the horse, particularly in the final scene. To the Aztecs, their first view of the horse was of a "monstrous apparition" "for they supposed the rider and the horse which they had never seen before to be one and the same."[27] Not only the horse, but gunfire, which was also new to them and which they felt was emitted by the horse, caused them to panic. For a long time, the horse symbolized supernatural terror to them, and they associated the horse with thunder and lightning. The effigy of Cortes' horse which was created by the inhabitants of the isles of Peten, after they had killed the original of the model by feeding it exotic dishes peculiar to their own diet, was worshipped as the god of thunder and lightning until 1613 when the Franciscan friars arrived to preach.[28] The horse and all the fury and violence of war brought about the downfall of the entire Aztec Empire. But certainly one of the key instruments in the strategy was the horse--an animal the Aztecs could not control because of their lack

of knowledge.

But knowledge serves no aid in the case of Yvonne, who has always had horses in her life, and yet whose destruction is brought about by the horse in the midst of great thunder and lightning. Yvonne's only real success in life seems to have been at the early age of fifteen when she was the "rough riding serial queen" who had been "submerged in burning lakes, suspended over precipices, ridden horses down ravines," and had been an expert at "double pick-offs" (p. 265). Because the height of her career was reached on a horse, she continues to identify herself with horses throughout Under the Volcano, so the final great irony comes hard for Yvonne when her end is delivered by a horse. Early in the introduction to Yvonne, "the equestrian statue of the turbulent Huerta" (p. 44) appears, the same statue which reappears in her dying visions (p. 336). Huerta was an excellent general and a fine horseman too, just one of many of his kind in terms of Mexican revolutionary history. He was fond of horses, alcohol, and blood, so in her final thoughts she becomes identified with him, but Geoffrey is also there as part of the great fusion. The statue of Huerta and the haunting vision of a giant horse leaping out of a New York cinema screen (p. 266) prefigure the death of Yvonne in the novel and ironically undercut her smug assurance and secret amusement that she was an "expert horsewoman," though this was unknown to Hugh (p. 261). Hugh also is tied to the horse symbol because he looks like a cowboy; he takes Yvonne

for a ride, and he has learned from Juan Cerillo in Spain how to make the sound of the horse. Perhaps his connection with Spain relates him to Cortes and the first Spanish conquerors on horses. But although both Hugh and Yvonne are identified with the conquering power of the horse, in the end that power is reversed to destroy them and their hopes of happiness. Whereas the original conquest was brought about by foreigners and the horse, this time, in miniature representation, a family of foreigners is conquered by the natives and their Mexican horse.

The serpent is the most complex animal symbol in Under the Volcano. Snakes and reptiles seem always to be associated with Hugh. When he is out riding with Yvonne two lizards vanish into the bougainvillea, and later he rides over a dead garter snake. Meanwhile back in the garden, Geoffrey contemplates the Garden of Eden story, sees a real snake, calls Mr. Quincy's cat "my-little-snake-in-the-grass" in response to questions and comments about Hugh, and later greets Hugh himself with "Hi there, Hugh, you old snake in the grass" (p. 141). All of these references seem to point up traditional symbolism for the snake, that is, in Biblical terms, it is the same original snake who betrays man and brings about his eviction. The phallic associations of the snake operate here too, because Hugh seduces his brother's wife.

But the serpent has special connotations for Mexico which Lowry was aware of and indicated in statements like:

> And here indeed it was again, the temptation, the cowardly, the future corruptive serpent, trample on it, stupid fool. Be Mexico. Have you not passed through the river. In the name of God be dead. And Hugh actually did ride over a dead garter snake, embossed on the path like a belt to a pair of bathing trunks. Or perhaps it was a Gila monster (p. 111).

Larousse says that "it would be impossible to list" the various symbolic meanings of the serpent in the cosmological thought of early Mexican tribes.[29] The serpent, particularly the winged serpent, was very important to the Aztecs and is still a significant part of the Mexican emblem. According to Waldo Frank the "winged serpent was the god of life, sun, wind, music, love, joy, justice were his traits."[30] But the serpent was devoured by the eagle, the symbol of violent death, hence the strongest force in the Aztec culture. The sacrificial deaths were caused in order to feed the gods, such as Huitzilopochtli. The Aztec's god of war, Huitzilopochtli, had several connections with the serpent. According to Lewis Spence

> Huitzilopochtli's image was surrounded by serpents, and rested on serpent-shaped supporters. His sceptre was a single snake, and his great drum was of serpent-skin.[31]

But he also had associations with the bird, since in American mythology the serpent and the bird are often unified. Thus the primary conception of Huitzilopochtli probably "arose from the idea of the serpent, the symbol of warlike wisdom and might, the symbol of the warrior's dart or spear, and the humming-bird, the harbinger of summer, type of the season when the lightning god has power over the crops."[32]

It was believed that Huitzilopochtli, as the serpent-god of lightning, had dominion over the crops and fruits of the earth. Paradoxically however, Huitzilopochtli also symbolized the warrior's death on the gladiatorial stone. The connection between the food supply and war was made simply within the Indian consciousness. That is, "if war was not waged annually the gods must go without flesh and perish, and if the gods succumbed the crops would fail and famine would destroy the race."[33]

Hugh's desire to kill the snake then is very much in keeping with Mexican lore. By killing the snake he would indeed "be Mexico" and "be dead." The Mexican way has always been to destroy or sacrifice in order to bring about the best good for the victim and the others. Hugh's thinking at this point is closely allied with the thinking of Geoffrey throughout. Geoffrey, whose knowledge of ancient lore and learning makes him sensitively aware of the tensions or oppositions between the evil and the attractive facets of everything, including the volcanoes and the vultures, is again, in the case of the serpent, torn apart and ultimately drawn to the violent and destructive pole. Geoffrey is hence able to rush toward his own violent sacrifice, a sacrifice symbolized by the killing of the serpent. For Hugh however, it is only a wish; he is not as strong as Geoffrey in fulfilling that wish.

Nor is he as strong as the scorpion, another creature thematically associated with Geoffrey. Geoffrey first notices the scorpion on the wall and describes him to the

others as a "beautiful creature" who will "only sting himself to death anyway" (p. 187). Later near his own death, he sees a dead scorpion on the wall, and thinks that the scorpion not wanting to be saved had stung itself to death. According to folklore, the scorpion does sting himself to death rather than be captured by his enemies. Frank Cowan in Curious Facts in the History of Insects says that it is an old story that "a scorpion surrounded with live coals, finding no method of escaping, grows desperate from its situation and stings itself to death." He also says that there is a story told in the East Indies that "the scorpion is sometimes so pestered with the pismires, that he stings himself to death in the head with his tail and so becomes a prey to the pismires."[34] For this reason, he is the perfect symbol for Geoffrey who also dies a sacrificial death. The scorpion is just another one of many creatures common to the Mexican landscape, which because of certain peculiar characteristics served as the ideal raw material for a Lowry symbol.

That these features of the landscape used by Lowry are truly authentic can quickly be discerned by reading any of a great number of travel adventures by tourists of Mexico. One of these is The Spirit of Mexico by Beryl Miles, an English traveller, who in 1961 published an account of her travels in Mexico. Many of Lowry's key symbols can be found here in their raw state. Not only does her account establish as ever-present facts of the Mexican scene, certain features and symbols noted by early scholars such as Prescott and Frank,

but it also focuses in many instances upon the exact same features as Lowry does. These features have special significance to both today's Mexican people who have inherited centuries of ancient lore and the traveller in Mexico who readily assimilates parts of the ancient knowledge.

Besides the usual general references to the extreme land forms which make for hazardous travel in Mexico and the extremes in climate such as the tremendous thunder and lightning storms which she witnessed and describes simply to provide a colorful background to her simple travelogue, she notes more specific features from the plant and animal worlds and in many cases the special symbolic implications which also interested Lowry. In regard to the flowers of Mexico she says: "I never ceased to be amazed at the profusion of flowers,"[35] and she comments early in her story on the scarlet bougainvillea which "tumbled down peeling plaster walls,"[36] and she even notes the "sheath-like red flowers"[37] of the plantain in the process of describing the great multitude of flowers she saw. The cardinal and the trogon also appear in her work--the cardinal as her "favorite" or "first-class bird" of the garden and the trogon as the "brilliantly colored one--red, yellow, and iridescent green" found on a bird-watching expedition to the tropical rain forest.[38] The vultures are present too, seen in a crowd on a dead cow working quickly and efficiently as the "recognized Sanitary Inspectors of Mexico."[39] Unlike the vulture, the eagle and the serpent impress travellers such

as Beryl Miles, not so much as real creatures but as art symbols because they frequently bombard the tourist as he studies the many ruins of ancient civilization. Miles describes stone slabs "engraved with eagles devouring human hearts" and human faces emerging "from the fangs of a plumed serpent."[40] She also notes that "today an eagle sitting on a cactus with a serpent in his mouth appears not only on the national flag and the coat of arms but also on the coinage."[41] Her observations of the dog are quite extensive in that she not only sees the special Mexican hairless dogs in the market, as well as in every Diego Rivera mural, but she also tells about the clay models of dogs found in tombs and about how the dog was a protector of the spirit.[42] Most tourists view the Diego Rivera murals, and these reveal the arrival of Cortes with his army and his horses. Miles comments on the new phenomenon of the horse to the Aztecs who "imagined horse and rider to be a single unit."[43]

Thus, each of the features of the landscape that Lowry chose to develop as a key symbol in Under the Volcano, is in fact a very real part of the Mexican setting as can be shown by examination of a standard travel adventure story. Lowry created a work of art by selecting the raw materials, and consciously moulding them through a series of intermediate stages until the details of setting became solidly united with character and theme in one complete whole. Contrary to the critical view that "disciplinary rejections . . . would have concentrated and shaped the author's effect more

clearly,"[44] it seems that indeed no small detail of setting is superfluous, rather each is a part of an elaborate pattern of symbols and associations which harmonize to present a single total effect. That single effect is beauty in destruction.

III. HISTORY

Malcolm Lowry was a serious scholar of history. Besides depending upon works such as Prescott and Diaz for historical information, he evidently studied Oswald Spengler's Decline of the West (1926) which offered a unifying theory or a philosophy of history which well suited the novel's characters and themes. One of the novel's main characters, Hugh Firmin, quotes Spengler early in the book and it is evident throughout that much of Lowry's treatment of history stems from Spengler's work.[1] Hugh says: "Journalism equals intellectual male prostitution of speech and writing, Yvonne. That's one point on which I'm in complete agreement with Spengler" (p. 100), but there are many points throughout the novel on which the author is in complete agreement with Spengler too.

Spengler's purpose, besides being to give an analysis of the decline of western European culture, was to develop a new philosophy and method of history which he called "the method of comparative morphology in world history."[2] This new method he likened to the Copernican discovery as opposed to the usual view of history, or Ptolemaic system, in which "great cultures are made to follow orbits around us as the presumed center of all world happenings. . . ."[3] That is, in his opinion we can not view things from any particular standpoint, but in "a high, time-free perspective embracing whole millenniums of historical world-forms. . . ."[4] Spengler's system of world-forms admits "no sort of privileged position

to the Classical or the Western Culture as against the Cultures of India, Babylon, China, Egypt, the Arabs [or] Mexico" which he calls "separate worlds of dynamic being which in point of mass count for just as much in the general picture of history as the Classical, while frequently surpassing it in point of spiritual greatness and soaring power."[5] An important aspect of this study of world forms to determine the future or destiny of a culture is that the forms function as symbols. In sum then, Spengler says:

> we must first be clear as to what culture is what its relations are to visible history, to life, to soul, to nature, to intellect, what the forms of its manifestation are and how far these forms--people, tongues and epochs, battles and ideas, states and gods, arts and craft works, sciences, laws, economic types and world ideas, great men and great events--may be accepted and pointed to as symbols.[6]

Or, as he says in short: ". . . is all history founded upon general biographic archetypes?"[7]

All of these principles regarding the general treatment of history can be seen operating throughout Under the Volcano in the many references to world history. For example, Geoffrey frequently brings together both the East and the West through comparisons of Indian cultures with Mexican cultures, both relatively obscure to our usual view of history with its Classical orientation. In his grand illusory speech in which he utters not a single word, he associates bhang with mescal, the Vedic gods with Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl, and Taxila with Tlaxcala and so on. The parallels are obscure to most western readers, but the point is that

upon investigation each can be seen to be symbolic of some characteristic behavior of man regardless of his location in time or space. Spengler quotes similar lists of even more obscure associations, yet he insists that there are uniformities to be found when the morphological standpoint is used.

> Who amongst them [present day historians] realizes that between the Differential Calculus and the dynastic principle of politics in the age of Louis XIV, between the Classical city-state and the Euclidean geometry, between the space-perspective of Western oil painting and the conquest of space by railroad, telephone and long-range weapon, between contrapuntal music and credit economics, there are deep uniformities?[8]

Many of Spengler's descriptions of the historian or student who has the power to perceive these uniformities in world history are exactly descriptive of Geoffrey Firmin, as opposed to Hugh Firmin who represents the typical historian. For example, when one analyses the violent debate between the brothers about defending poor little defenseless countries such as Spain, the following statement by Spengler describes the two disputants:

> it makes a great difference whether anyone lives under the constant impression that his life is an element in a far wider life-course that goes on for hundreds and thousands of years, or conceives of himself as something rounded off and contained.[9]

Hugh is unable to generalize beyond the incidents in his own small world and hence he can not follow the complex associations which the Consul makes, drawing on all periods in history and literature. His bewilderment is registered in the nature of his contributions to the debate:

> "How did we get onto this? . . ."
> "What web-footed fowl in what lagoon?"

> "Well . . ."
> "For Christ sake, . . ."
> "I should like to know what the bloody hell it is you imagine you're talking." (p. 309-310).

While he considers the case of the dying Indian by the roadside and his role in the incident, Geoffrey speaks of "interference in general" illustrating variously with examples from Tolstoy, the history of Tlaxcala, the Spanish War, Ethiopia, Flanders, the Belgian Congo and others. Geoffrey sees that "countries, civilisations, empires, great hordes perish for no reason at all, and their soul and meaning with them . . ." (p. 310), that is, he sees cultures as Spengler himself who says:

> Each culture has its own new possibilities of self-expression which arise, ripen, decay, and never return. . . . each is limited in duration and self-contained, just as each species of plant has its peculiar blossom or fruit, its special type of growth and decline. These cultures, sublimated life essences, grow with the same superb aimlessness as the flowers of the field.[10]

In all ways Geoffrey seems to have Spengler's vision of world history, or is what Spengler calls a "real student of mankind." According to Spengler, this student

> treats no standpoint as absolutely right or absolutely wrong. In the face of such grave problems as that of Time or that of Marriage, it is insufficient to appeal to personal experience, or an inner voice or reason, or the opinion of ancestors or contemporaries. These may say what is true for the questioner himself and for his time, but that is not all. In other cultures the phenomenon talks a different language, for other men there are different truths. The thinker must admit the validity of all or of none.[11]

Geoffrey admits the validity of all, but the tremendous tension created within himself is thus responsible for the

mighty destructive sundering of that self. For the man who sees the repetitive cycles of life and recognises their presence in all cultures, the answer can only be that of Geoffrey, an answer whose fatalism may be interpreted as pessimistic. At the end of his analysis of history in Chapter X, Geoffrey refuses "peace" and the offer of a "sober and non-alcoholic Paradise" (p. 313) and makes a conscious choice in favor of death and hell which he begins running toward. Spengler recognises the fact that his answer will be interpreted as pessimistic, if his philosophy is adopted as a practical acheme of life.

> It will no doubt be objected that such a world-outlook, which in giving this certainty as to the outlines and tendency of the future cuts off all far-reaching hopes, would be unhealthy for all and fatal for many, once it ceased to be a mere theory and was adopted as a practical scheme of life by the group of personalities effectively moulding the future.[12]

But nonetheless, he asserts emphatically the necessity of facing squarely the truth whether it be pessimistic or not. That is, he says: "We are civilized, not Gothic or Rococo people; we have to reckon with the hard cold facts of a late life, to which the parallel is to be found not in Pericles' Athens but in Caesar's Rome."[13]

For Malcolm Lowry and for Geoffrey Firmin, the parallels are to be found in the history of Mexico, but the method and the conclusions are the same as those of Oswald Spengler. The choice of Mexico and the emphasis upon the Conquest was a good one for Lowry because the Conquest period exactly parallels that of Caesar's Rome. The period was that of a

civilization in decline. The Spaniards arrived when it had already entered its twilight--the Aztecs had debased the culture which provided their outward glory.[14] Furthermore, when all the various periods of Mexican history are viewed morphologically and symbolically the tragic and destructive cycles of life are manifest.

Mexico possesses a long and rich history from which to draw examples which illustrate how various cultures arise, ripen, and decay and how the characteristic behavior of man compares from period to period. Written records document thoroughly the Indian period just prior to the Spanish Conquest of Mexico as well as the Conquest itself, the Colonial period, the period of Independence and the period of Revolution, but the sum of all these periods is relatively short in comparison to that history evidenced by the many unexplained ruins left by even earlier cultures of untold ages past. In Under the Volcano, Lowry shows a concern with both the whole picture of Mexican history and with the specific fragments of Mexican history. Spengler shows the relationship between general history and the specific periods in the following statement:

> no single fragment of history could be thoroughly illuminated unless and until the secret of world history itself, to wit the story of higher mankind as an organism of regular structure, had been cleared up.[15]

Just as Spengler is concerned with "whole" pictures of history, so Lowry interprets world history by creating images which convey the immense weight of all time. The weight of the entire past which each man inherits and must bear in his particular small segment of time is perfectly symbolized

by the scene which meets Geoffrey, Hugh, and Yvonne at the end of Chapter IX.

> Bent double, groaning with the weight, an old lame Indian was carrying on his back, by means of a strap looped over his forehead, another poor Indian, yet older and more decrepit than himself. He carried the older and his crutches, trembling in every limb under the weight of the past, he carried both their burdens (p. 280).

This image may have come from Lowry's knowledge of the ancient Mayan calendar. The Mayans regarded days as animate beings and every division of time had to be carried by divine messengers which were represented by numbers. According to Irene Nicholson, a student of Mayan artifacts: "In hieroglyphs the messengers were represented carrying their burdens, the weight taken by a strap across the forehead as one can still see miners raising their loads. . . ."[16] Similarly, the weight of the past at the world level is emphasized by the image of Cervantes displaying the contents of his bottom wardrobe drawer. Cervantes' people, the Tlaxcalans, may seem like a small and insignificant group of people noted mainly for their role in the Conquest of Mexico, but the image of a drawer "chock full of books, including the History of Tlaxcala, in ten volumes" (p. 289) is an impressive depiction of the weight of time and history to any single man. Cervantes' proud assertion, "I am an insignificant man, and I do not read these books to prove my insignificance" (p. 289), exemplifies the role of man in the whole story of mankind.

The great weight of the world's past is borne also at the personal level in the lives of the main characters.

Richard Costa says "'the weight of the past' is what really haunts the book," and he sees it best at the personal level in "the stamp of former-ness--pastness--on the characters." He cites the following list and says "there is no escape from the past."

> Geoffrey Firmin, dispossessed former consul; his half-brother Hugh, a former fighter for the Republic in the Spanish Civil War; Yvonne, former Hollywood child film star and the former consul's former wife; a French former film director who is the former consul's closest friend and his former wife's former lover.[17]

Lowry's general treatment or interpretation of history, as evidenced by the two main images demonstrating the weight of time, (parallel to the weight of the past symbolized by the volcanoes), is certainly a tragic one. To illustrate his tragic view of life, or the secret of world history as he sees it, he chooses specific characters from Mexican history and relates them to his own characters. In this way the failures of human understanding in figures like Cortez and Moctezuma, Maximilian and Carlotta, and the Revolutionary heroes are linked with the same defects in characters like Geoffrey, Hugh, and Yvonne. Thus, these historical Mexican figures come to symbolize some of the basic causes of tragedy, that is, betrayal, exile, and personal pride, all of which are significant thematic patterns in Under the Volcano.

By coming to grips with the Mexican culture in this way, Lowry fulfils Spengler's role of "Menschenkenner." He completely enters into a culture-soul and interprets the symbolic significance of each feature to shed light on the dark questions of life. His method is accurately described

by Spengler's statement:

> To attempt the interpretation of a poet or a prophet, a thinker or a conqueror, is of course nothing new, but to enter a culture-soul--Classical, Egyptian or Arabian--so intimately as to absorb into one's self, to make part of one's own life, the totality expressed by typical men and situations, by religion and polity, by style and tendency, by thought and customs, is quite a new manner of experiencing life. Every epoch, every great figure, every deity, the cities, the tongues, the nations, the arts, in a word everything that ever existed and will become existent, are physiognomic traits of high symbolic significance that it will be the business of quite a new kind of "judge of men" (Menschenkenner) to interpret. Poems and battles, Isis and Cybele, festivals and Roman Catholic masses, blast furnaces and gladiatorial games, dervishes and Darwinians, railways and Roman roads, "Progress" and "Nirvana", newspapers, mass slavery, money, machinery--all these are equally signs and symbols in the world picture of the past that the soul presents to itself and would interpret. Light will be thrown on the dark questions which underlie dread and longing--those deepest of primitive human feelings--and which the will-to-know has clothed in the problems of time, necessity, space, love, death, and first causes.[18]

Under the Volcano throws light on the whole question of human betrayal as a very complex and ambiguous part of the tragedy of life. A complex circle of betrayals ensnares the main characters of the novel; each has betrayed the other in some way, regardless of ties of blood or friendship. The betrayals range all the way from the seduction of a man's wife by both his brother and his friend, and the infidelity of a wife, to the larger example of the capture of an entire crew of men by a warship camouflaged as a peaceful freighter. But human betrayal is universalized throughout the novel and shown to be a key factor in all of man's relationships.

One of the chief symbols of this betrayal is Tlaxcala, and Lowry uses his knowledge of the history of Tlaxcala and

her leaders to create the symbol. Probably from Prescott, Lowry learned how the Spaniards won the loyalty and support of the Tlaxcalans in their battle against the Aztec capital. Because the Tlaxcalans, a neighboring tribe, begrudged sending generations of war captives to the sacrificial altars of the Aztecs, they were anxious for revenge. Nevertheless, their support of the Spaniards constituted a prime example of betrayal of one's own people, for the net result to them was conquest, submission to a foreign power, and loss of their own cultural glory. According to Prescott, the chief cause of the conquest was this betrayal by the Tlaxcalans. In a summary paragraph to Book VI, he says:

> The Aztec monarchy fell by the hands of its own subjects, under the direction of European sagacity and science. Had it been united it might have bidden defiance to the invaders.19

For Lowry and for Geoffrey then, the early Tlaxcalans represent betrayal, and even their modern descendants are stained with the mark of traitor, for Geoffrey says: "He had adjured Cervantes to silence; had the Tlaxcaltecan unable to resist it betrayed him?" (p. 303). This image calls up all the past history of Tlaxcala just as other references like "her savage and traitorous Tlaxcalans" (p. 287) enforce the dark image from the past.

One of the most notorious Tlaxcalans is Xicohtencatl, recorded by Lowry as a part of the tourist folder which the Consul finds in the grey stone tomb-toilet in Chapter X. The folder notes the home of Xicohtencatl and the spot where he "harangued his soldiers, telling them to fight the conquerors

to the limit" (p. 301). According to Prescott, Xicohtencatl

> was the first chief who successfully resisted the arms of the invaders; and, had the natives of Anahuac, generally been animated with a spirit like his, Cortez would never have set foot in the capital of Moctezuma. He was gifted with a clearer insight into the future than his countrymen; for he saw that the European was an enemy far more to be dreaded than the Aztec.[20]

Yet this same man was executed as a traitor. He was hanged by Cortez and the Tlaxcalans, his own people, for swerving in his loyalty to the Spanish banner which he had earlier consented to fight under. The Tlaxcalans were traitors to their country, and Xicohtencatl was a traitor to the Spaniards. But the tourist folder does not allow us to forget just how pervasive the theme of betrayal is; the circle of betrayal is foul and ensnaring. The tourist folder which glorifies the "Seat of the History of the Conquest" (p. 295), with its famous convent where the first four Tlaxcaltecan senators were baptised thus acquiring Cortez and his captains as God-Fathers, and with its famous chapel where for the first time the gospel was preached in the New World and where the senators for the first time prayed to the conqueror's god, is also an ironically bitter reminder of the Spaniards' betrayal of the Indians. In the name of religion they performed their traitorous deeds which brought about the conquest and exploitation of these peoples.

The period of the Conquest of Mexico is thus a complex series of betrayals. In addition to the first and major betrayal of the Tlaxcalans, and the Tlaxcalans by the Spaniards, there is of course the sad betrayal of Moctezuma

himself. Moctezuma who royally welcomed Cortez and his men as gods, and lavishly entertained them with gifts of gold, was eventually to be fettered by these same men. And as a final and even greater blow he was to taste the last bitterness of degradation when his own people reviled and rejected him. Prescott records a picture of Moctezuma's betrayal describing him as taunted by his own chiefs with cries of "woman, coward! the whitemen have made you a woman,--fit only to weave and spin."[21] Lowry makes him into a striking symbol of betrayal, as the Consul recalls this phase of Mexico's history: ". . . sitting with her [Mexico's] innermost citadel in chains, drinking chocolate, her pale Moctezuma" (p. 288). He is a twice betrayed figure, but is he not also a betrayer of his own country?

Even the great Cortez himself, like Moctezuma, was finally to be betrayed by his king and people. When he returned from his first trip to Spain where he received great favor from the king, he was refused entrance to Mexico City, so he retired to Cuernavaca where he built his palace, a symbol of his denial by the Spaniards of the new government. For nine years he was also denied by his monarch and he died in Spain bitter and disillusioned. His palace appears throughout Under the Volcano as a "dark castled shape" (p. 10), another dark symbol of man's betrayal. In one image it is seen high on a cliff with "a man gazing over the valley who from his air of martial intentness might have been Cortez himself" (p. 56). Man stands alone in the face of the

dark betrayal which surrounds him on all sides. Every man is guilty, for in order to survive himself, each must at some time in his life become a traitor to some cause or other. Betrayal is exploitation and exploitation is an endless cycle as described in Chapter X:

> Spaniard exploits Indian, then when he had children, he exploited the halfbreed, then the pure blooded Mexican Spaniard, the criollo, then the mestizo exploits everybody foreigners, Indians, and all. Then the Germans and Americans exploited him: now the final chapter, the exploitation of everybody by everybody else-- (p. 299).

The rule as exhibited by Mexican history, is that man betrays man and man exploits man in order to survive himself.

The best single example of this principle of betrayal and exploitation in action is the Spanish Conquest itself and this becomes a major symbol in Under the Volcano. In the early pages of the novel, two ragged Indians seen by Laruelle, are described as "unbelievably courtly, delicate. Their carriage suggested the majesty of Aztec princes their faces obscure sculpturings on Yucatecan ruins" (p. 11). A sense of tragedy is evoked by the image, a sense similar to that evoked by Prescott as he describes the conquered Mexican:

> The same blood flows in his veins that flowed in theirs. But ages of tyranny have passed over him, he belongs to a conquered race. . . . Under the Spanish domination, their numbers have silently melted away. Their energies are broken. They no longer tread their mountain plains with the conscious independence of their ancestors. In their faltering step and meek and melancholy aspect we read the sad characters of the conquered race.[22]

The bitter truth about the Spanish Conquest is not found on tourist folders and calendars which glorify the integration

of the Spaniards and Indians as "un alto grado de perfeccion" (p. 27). Nor is it found in the Keats poem "On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer." The truth is revealed by the Consul at the bullthrowing when he creates a giant fusion of the sports spectacle and the Conquest through the means of the sestet of the Keats poem. His thoughts are a clever parody of the poem where the same "stout Cortez" gazes not at the Pacific but at the "horrific," because he is the "least pacific of all men" (p. 273). The Consul has fun with the rhyming words "tantalises" from the bullthrowing and "surmises" from the poem, and he relocates Cortez in the historically correct spot--"Silent on a peak in Quauhnahuac" instead of "in Darien." But in the final sentence: "Christ, what a disgusting performance--", the Conquest and the bullthrowing completely coalesce, and the truth about each is uttered. Although Keats chose the wrong figure as the discoverer of the Pacific, the sublime picture he presents of the discovery is easily reversed by clever word plays to give the extreme opposite view of conquest.

Under the Volcano ties together inextricably the concepts of conquest, exploitation, and betrayal through complex fusions and symbolic associations. An example of this is the way in which betrayal becomes universalized through relating the Tlaxcalans,[23] the prime symbol of betrayal, to other groups and other people in the novel. At a simple level the three main characters of the novel are linked with Tlaxcala, the seat of betrayal, by Geoffrey's insistence that they all go "straight to Tlaxcala" (p. 302), and that they

go "back" to Tlaxcala. He says this as if they had been there before, when it is really Granada the Consul has confused with Tlaxcala. (According to Prescott, Cortez too, in a letter to his emperor, compared Tlaxcala to Granada.)[24] He distinctly allies all three with the traitorous site when he refers to the bus which was to take them "home" to Tlaxcala (p. 306). In a more complex way, the Consul works out an elaborate relationship between Tlaxcala and Taxila which is "apart from any verbal one" (p. 307). There is a fusion of Cortez and Alexander as conquerors who persuade others to betray their own people. Geoffrey constantly makes connections between Mexico and India, the land of his childhood, as was shown in his perception of the volcanoes, and this time the parallel is precise. When Alexander conquered part of India he received aid from the city of Taxila because all the surrounding cities were "actual or potential enemies,"[25] just as the Tlaxcalans were enemies of Moctezuma. But Yvonne is somehow mixed up in the fusion of Cortez and Alexander within Geoffrey's mind, which well accords with another relationship which is drawn between the Tlaxcalans and Hugh. Hugh is aware of the betrayal by the Tlaxcalans because he tells Yvonne about the crossing of the ravine by Diaz and the Tlaxcalans to "beat up Quauhnahuac" (p. 100). Although he jokes about "Bernal Diaz and his Tlaxcalans" as a "superb name for a dance band," there is a serious incongruity in the Spanish and Indian combination. Hugh's knowledge of the Tlaxcalan history associates him

symbolically with the traitorous Tlaxcalans. This symbolic pattern is further reinforced by Hugh's constant thoughts about Judas, the arch betrayer, and about his own happiness that can never be "since brotherhood was betrayed" (p. 107). In addition, Geoffrey associates Hugh with another arch betrayer when he thinks "Et tu Bruto" and feels his "glance at Hugh becoming a cold look of hatred" (p. 303). If Hugh as betrayer is allied with the Tlaxcalans, and Yvonne is associated with the conquerors or those who interfere, the two go together to create a vicious kind of circle. The circle can exist at both the personal level and the level of large groups or nations, and because of the many complexities and ambiguities, it is difficult to bestow blame or responsibility on any one side. Valid intellectual arguments can be stated as in the following cases by the Consul:

> the Conquest took place in a civilization which was as good if not better than that of the conquerors, a deep-rooted structure (p. 300),

> Why should anybody interfere with anybody? Why should anybody have interfered with the Tlaxcaltecans for example . . . (p. 309).

But, in actual practice, conquest, betrayal, and exploitation are the facts of history and of life. The student of history who recognizes these dark truths has no choice but to reach the same conclusion that the Consul does in the final chapters of the novel.

In addition to uncovering the truth about the pervasive nature of human betrayal, the novel also seeks to illuminate through references to events of Mexican history, a second problem: man's exile or alienation. The fantastic fairy tale

episode of Maximilian and Carlotta is an appropriate motif to exactly personify the theme of exile in Under the Volcano. There are two extensive descriptions in Under the Volcano of the ruins of the castle of Maximilian and Carlotta in Quauhnahuac, ruins which come to be a symbol of exile in the novel. Ruins alone imply tragedy--especially ruins which consist of broken pink pillars (pp. 14 and 123). What caused the abandonment of such architectural splendor? The explanation is succinctly stated in A Guide to Mexican History:

> An idealist and an honorable man he came to accept a throne which, in all good faith, he believed was being offered to him by the Mexican people. But for Mexicans, Maximilian was an alien intruder and they would have none of him.[26]

Consequently, he died facing a firing squad, the tragic fulfillment of his destiny, and his wife was left in the darkness of insanity, completing what Yvonne calls "an awfully tragic story" (p. 124). Maximilian and Carlotta were outsiders sent by another outsider, Napoleon III, to establish a monarchy in a strange and foreign land. Politically, it was another case of interference, European interference in a situation no outsider could understand, and the result was downfall on all sides. Maximilian and his friends were strangers to the Mexican climate just as Laruelle and the Firmins are in Under the Volcano.

Laruelle's thoughts in the first chapter indicate the sense of exile which is common to the Firmins also:

> A sense of fear . . . after all these years, and on his last day here, still a stranger. Four years almost five, and he still felt like

a wanderer on another planet (p. 9).

Geoffrey Firmin, born of English parents in India, found that he belonged to no land after his father went away, because in India there was no family and in England there were "too many establishments and schools" (p. 78). Living with the Taskersons was a kind of exile for Geoffrey because he had "no tastes in common" (p. 19) with the boys and was considered queer because of his intense reading and continual "woolgathering" about India. Later in life, because of the strange happenings on board the Samaritan, the Consul is thought of by Laruelle as a "lachrymose pseudo 'Lord Jim' living in self-imposed exile" (p. 33). And completing the pattern of exile is his consulship in Quauhnahuac, the result of what Laruelle calls being "kicked downstairs into ever remoter consulships" (p. 31). Of course, in addition to the obvious physical isolation of Geoffrey, there is an overwhelming sense of mental alienation. Geoffrey always talks about the men of ideas and yet his own ideas seem so alien to those closest to him. Geoffrey searches for a home physically and mentally, he expresses these desires in statements like:

> Ah, how cold it was that night, and bitter, with a howling wind and wild steam blowing from the pavement gratings where the ragged children were making to sleep early under their poor newspapers. Yet none was more homeless than you as it grew later and colder and darker, and still you had not found her (p. 88).

His recurrent wish to become a Mexican subject, and to "live among the Indians like William Blackstone" (p. 82),

is also expressive of the desire to belong somewhere. At the end of course, this desire is actually fulfilled because ultimately he does belong to Mexico; he becomes fused with all that Mexico has ever stood for, which is union with the universe in death. Geoffrey Firmin is no longer an exile; his exile brings him a tragic death just as Maximilian's did, but death is the end of exile, so in one sense, particularly the Indian sense, it is also triumph.

The theme of exile runs through the lives of the other characters too. Hugh is, of course, in view of his family background somewhat a duplicate of Geoffrey. His life too has been a search for an identity. Even small details in Lowry's writing, like the fact that Hugh once arrived in Paris from Aden "in a fix" over his "carte identite" and his passport which he preferred to travel without, indicate Hugh's feeling of a lack of identity and sense of exile. He calls himself "a piece of driftwood on the Indian Ocean" "without a place on earth" (p. 153). His adventures in music and on the sea represent his failure to find an identity, but unlike Geoffrey he continues to dream and has his own illusions about saving the world and thus finding himself. His doom is the perpetual exile in which all men are trapped.

Yvonne too, has a background of physical exile stemming from her childhood in Hawaii, her career in the United States, her wanderings in Europe, and her life in Mexico with Geoffrey. Eternally, she searches for that place where

she can not just escape but really start again, "really and cleanly somewhere" like a rebirth (p. 277). But life is exile according to Under the Volcano, and that place can never be found in this world, just as Maximilian and Carlotta could not find it in the New World, and just as the Spanish colonials of Mexico could not find it even by building their "wrought-iron lacework" walls which concealed less Mexico than a Spaniard's dream of home (p. 63). Early in the first chapter, Laruelle associates Maximilian and Carlotta, "the two lonely empurpled exiles, human beings finally, lovers out of their element" (p. 14) with Geoffrey and Yvonne because he had once stumbled upon them embracing in the Palace. The quarrelling voices and passionate weepings of the two couples become confused in his memory, indicating the common destiny they share. Both Maximilian and Geoffrey accept their fate in the manner of the ruined palace which "appeared so reconciled to its ruin no sadness touched it" (p. 123). Maximilian's last words were: "I pardon all and pray they will also pardon me. Would that my blood might help this country. Long live Mexico. Long live her independence,"27 and Geoffrey's last words, even after he had been shot, were: "Christ . . . this is a dingy way to die" (p. 373). In the actual face of death a similar kind of quiet resignation takes over. In this resignation there is triumph, for only death can end man's exile on earth.

The third and probably most fundamental problem illuminated by symbols from Mexican history in Under the

Volcano is that of human pride. At the immediate and personal level, pride is the crux of the relationships among the main characters. Their pride seems to be at the opposite pole from love in a world where "no se puede vivir sin amar." Richard Costa sees the "forfeiture of love" among the characters as "due to various forms of hubris."[28] All of the liaisons are tortured and abortive due to self-pride which has caused them to try living without loving. Dale Edmonds summarizes their malaise and the malaise of the modern world when he says: "it is not that love has ceased to exist in our world; it is that selfish rather than selfless love is the characteristic form."[29] This selfish love or pride which controls the destiny of Lowry's characters and keeps them forever alienated is mirrored in historical characters, particularly in those who carried pride to its ultimate extreme seeking selfish and material ends through violence. Modern Mexican history, that is the Period of Independence and the Period of Revolution, furnished Lowry with bloody descriptions of unlimited violence and a whole gallery of unscrupulous characters to weave as motif threads into his novel. Lowry chose Benito Juarez, Porfirio Diaz, Huerta, and Cárdenas as symbols of the senseless kind of pride which can end only in tragedy.

Although Juarez and Diaz are recorded in most histories as the two men who gave their country its only period of reasonable order and stability, it is interesting that they both came to power in the manner of revolutionaries. Juarez,

the humble Indian leader venerated as a hero and called the "man who really governed Mexico for the first time in its history,"[30] left a record very little more sterling than that of the worst of the revolutionaries. He fought with guerilla bands in the hills, and finally won Mexico City through a naval battle at Vera Cruz assisted by American vessels and arms. One historian calls Juarez a betrayer for this action:

> It is generally conceded that Juarez violated Mexican independence and betrayed his own country into the hands of the friendly enemy.[31]

In addition, his first act once he was in power was one of ruthless revenge, a drive to pay for the war with confiscation of church property. This period, as described by Schlarman, sounds as violently senseless as any during the revolution:

> the Juarez government fell upon the colleges and schools and convents and orphanages and hospitals to drive out the religious, priests and nuns, and to rob and loot. The orphans were left without keep, the aged and sick were without shelter and care. Valuable libraries, books and manuscripts were scattered, precious marble statues were taken from the churches and stored away in stables, and delicate ebony carvings (at one time a specialty of Mexico) were used as firewood in soldier's barracks.[32]

Juarez, too, was the man who proudly and stubbornly insisted on the death of Maximilian. Such was the procedure for one of the best leaders Mexico ever had. At the end of the reign of Juarez, Juan Cerillo, Hugh's hero and Lowry's idealist, could say:

> Juarez had lived and died. Yet was it a country with free speech, and the guarantee of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? A country of brilliantly muralled schools, and where even each little cold

> mountain village had its stone open-air stage, and the land was owned by its people free to express their native genius? A country of model farms: of hope?-- It was a country of slavery, where human beings were sold like cattle . . . (p. 108).

Porfirio Diaz, who followed Juarez and ruled for about thirty years, does not hold the same heroic stature that Juarez does, rather he is remembered as the "most efficient despot Latin America ever produced."[33] Charges of all kinds of misrule are laid at his feet, and just one of the many instances of violence during his regime would be his own private police force called the "Rurales" instituted "to deal with bandits who infested the hills, strikers, protesting Indians, and other troublesome sectors of the population." This force was recruited from "among city thugs and bandits themselves" and authorized to shoot on sight.[34] One of his most serious crimes was the cruel forced relocation of Indian peoples, as for example, the Yaqui Indians of Northern Mexico, who were forced "by the thousands to other sections as far away as hot humid, and malarial infected Yucatan,"[35] an extreme example of exile. To Juan Cerillo, Porfirio Diaz represents all that is evil in his country:

> All this spelt Porfirio Diaz: rurales everywhere, jefes politicos, and murder, the extirpation of liberal political institutions, the army an engine of massacre, an instrument of exile (p. 108).

And to Sr. Bustamente, the days of Porfirio Diaz were "the days when, in America every small town along the Mexican border harboured a Consul" (p. 29). In those days the Consuls were spies, therefore he logically concludes that

Señor Firmin is also such a Consul, since Britain had severed diplomatic relations with Mexico. Here the association is made directly between Geoffrey, in a position of power and authority, and the many other unscrupulous figures who have wielded power in Mexico.

Another such figure is Huerta, a Mexican leader during the Revolution. Grotesque details are revealed by any historical study of this man. The Guide to Mexican History calls the seventeen months of Huerta's rule "a reign of terror"[36] and Schlarman reports that Huerta "drank heavily, and nearly every evening had to be led off to bed; but he was always up in the morning bright and early, looking as though he were not even acquainted with the odor of drink."[37] Lowry capitalized on these two features of Huerta's character in order to create a powerful symbol for his novel. In Under the Volcano the first reference is to an equestrian statue where Huerta is called "turbulent" and "wild-eyed" seated atop his horse, a Mexican engine of destruction (p. 44). In Yvonne's final death vision, the same statue appears "rearing, poised over her petrified in midair." It is Huerta, "the drunkard, the murderer" (p. 36), she thinks, but here she also links him with the Consul, for could he not also spring "to his feet sober as a judge" (p. 79) in the true Taskerson tradition, and had he not also been mysteriously associated with the murders on board the Samaritan? She, too, because of her serial queen horse-riding days is associated with the destructive force of the horse and thus Yvonne Griffaton also appears in the gigantic fusion of

the Huerta statue. Not so openly and violently as Huerta or the Consul has she sought power and material goods but in the course of her life, she too, has destroyed others for the sake of her own selfish pride. Her prestige as a movie queen was important to her, and so was her millionaire, playboy husband, but her story is a long series of ruins--a dead career, two dead marriages, a dead child, several dead affairs, and many douche-bag abortions--an unenviable record, as dark as that of the Mexican revolutionaries.

Historically similar in motive to Huerta, and thus symbolically similar for Lowry, is another Mexican leader by the name of Cárdenas. Because of his revolutionary background, Cárdenas too, is a symbol of pride, another selfish individualist who merely adopted the violence of revolution in order to make himself rich. But in addition to this, because he is chiefly noted for his agrarian reforms, Lowry weaves him thematically into his whole network of references dealing with the exile motif already discussed. The problem of land ownership has been a crucial issue throughout all ages, because ownership of the soil lessens man's sense of exile on earth. Since the time of the Conquest, the Mexicans have fought to own their own land, an endless struggle against foreign intervention and powerful and selfish individuals of their own country, so the theme of exile is particularly and blatantly manifest in the Mexican setting. Cárdenas is the Mexican figure most associated with Mexican agriculture and land reforms, but

according to one historian, "the decay of Mexican agriculture reached its darkest stage" at the time of Cárdenas and many "man-made deserts of sterile rocky gullied lands" remain today as the result of deadly soil waste and erosion at this time.[38] Cárdenas' program for land distribution involved "arming the peons to whom he had given land . . . and this led to many bloody encounters and abuses."[39] The peon did not really own this land; it was only granted to him to work as long as he supported the political party, and often in addition, the grant was too small to be useful. Hugh respects Cárdenas and his land reforms, along with two other men who represent human causes, Stalin and Nehru (p. 153). He refers to the fact that lots of people don't like Cárdenas or his laws (p. 297), and he admires Juan Cerillo for his work with the Credit Banks which finance the collective farms of Cárdenas (p. 107). He thus associates himself with the cause represented by Cárdenas, just as Yvonne does, when in her search for a little spot of her own, she admires the "adorable farm" which she believes to be some "government experiment" (p. 105). Geoffrey is aware of the tensions and dangers inherent in these two views and he comments cynically that "perhaps Adam was the first property owner and God, the first agrarian, a kind of Cárdenas" and that "the original sin was to be an owner of property . . ."(p. 133). His link with Cárdenas is different from that of Hugh and Yvonne, but the link is an important one.

Cárdenas was a powerful leader who bore strong similarities to Huerta, Diaz, and Juarez. The fact is that all men in

positions of authority are of much the same character. This is important in terms of Under the Volcano, because Geoffrey, too, throughout his life has held positions of some authority. When he looks at the Chief of Gardens in the final scene and sees an image of his earlier self, that is, "the Chief of Gardens might have been an image of himself when lean, bronzed, serious, beardless, and at the crossroads of his career, he had assumed the Vice Consulship in Granada" (p. 359), the identification is extensive for the Chief is just one of a great string of political strongmen throughout Mexican history and all history who have behaved in such a fashion. The mysterious incident of the "Samaritan" is the key to the relationship between Geoffrey and all of the Mexican revolutionaries named in Under the Volcano. Whether or not Geoffrey did single-handedly put the Germans in the furnaces, he still carries the guilt of involvement in some kind of unscrupulous act, in many ways parallel to the deeds of these historical figures, deeds performed at a time of trouble in order to gain or retain power. These violent acts are acts of pride which in the performance must inevitably betray some other member of humanity, and which once performed result in some kind of exile from the rest of humanity, and ultimately a tragic downfall for the performer. Such is the condition of man as viewed by Malcolm Lowry in Under the Volcano. His three themes of betrayal, exile, and pride are inextricably linked and illustrated through the characters of the novel and certain notorious figures from Mexican history.

The symbolic study of all history gave Oswald Spengler a pessimistic picture of the declining West which was adopted by Malcolm Lowry and enacted in his main character Geoffrey Firmin. Geoffrey is very interested in history and very knowledgeable too. The lessons of history are simple to the Consul and easily summed up in his statement that history is a ravine choked up with refuse. When all of mankind's past gives man an inheritance of such unbearable guilt, Geoffrey Firmin's pessimistic view of life is valid. Man is a proud self-centered creature with limited human understanding, the lack of which causes him to err in his relationships with others bringing untold suffering to all. Mexican history with its many dramatic examples of betrayal and exile and selfish pride offered to Malcolm Lowry the raw material he needed to convert into fresh symbols for his novel. And, as in the case of the geographical symbols earlier surveyed, the historical symbols also work precisely because they are fresh and unconventional. They demand some knowledge and understanding of Mexican history for a rich interpretation, but being an intense historian himself, Lowry included within the text of his novel much of the information which is needed to interpret the symbolic historical figures and events. Malcolm Lowry and Geoffrey Firmin learned much about life by steeping themselves in Mexico itself--its geography, history, and mythology.

IV. MYTHOLOGY

Mexican mythology functions in at least three ways in Under the Volcano. At a simple level Lowry used certain animals and other objects heavy with symbolic significance to the Mexican mind, as important symbols in his own work. Drawing on Aztec, Mayan, and Zapotec myth, he found symbols which contribute to the development of his characters and themes. For example, the eagle, serpent, dog, rabbit, butterfly and the calendar, as well as certain colors, certain ancient gods, and certain sites are used in this way. More importantly, however, Mexican myth is used both as a major structural principle of the novel and as the very subject of the novel itself. The Day of the Dead is the single most important Mexican mythological feature of the novel which functions structurally, and secondly, the "Legend of the Suns" also performs a structural purpose. The unique attitude toward death, which was integral to ancient Mexican thought and which is a vital part of the Day of the Dead ritual largely lost over the centuries to modern Mexicans, powerfully infuses the whole of Under the Volcano. Lowry struggled toward the essence of ancient myth and made it meaningful to our own day.

In Myth and the Modern Novel, John White describes the use of myth in the twentieth century rhetoric of fiction. He says that mythological motifs "emerged at a point in the historical development of the novel when theorists of the

genre observed (and some even prescribed) a constraint upon more direct forms of authorial comment and characterization."[1] In place of authorial comment, Lowry uses the eagle, serpent, and dog, all important ancient Mexican symbols, to contribute to the death themes of Under the Volcano. In Aztec thought, the eagle represented the most coveted fate of all, for after death, warriors became eagles or "companions of the Sun and they accompanied him in his journey to the zenith."[2] Likewise, the serpent with its many symbolic meanings, ranging from chthonian forces to strength and wisdom and rain, was of major importance to early American peoples, as was the dog which was a protector of the spirit after death. As has already been shown, these symbols function indirectly in the novel as part of the author's glorification of death.

Other Aztec and Mayan symbols offer insights into the characters of the novel and are thus part of the author's method of characterization. For example, rabbits and butterflies are minor symbols used in characterising Geoffrey and Yvonne. The rabbit is consistently associated with Geoffrey in the final chapter where Geoffrey reaches the height of his drunkenness. Geoffrey first notices the "white rabbit eating an ear of Indian corn" (p. 337) in the corner of the bar, he later tries "fruitlessly" to make friends with the white rabbit (p. 338), and then he sees the rabbit as a "phantom of himself" (p. 362). In the final pages, the rabbit steals the scene when "a sudden noise from the corner startle[s] everyone" (p. 370). The scene is described as:

> it was only the uncontrollable face on the barroom floor, the rabbit having a nervous convulsion trembling all over, wrinkling its nose and scuffing disapprovingly (p. 370).

An understanding of the significance of the rabbit in Mexican myth adds to one's understanding of this association between Geoffrey and the rabbit. Lewis Spence in The Myths of Mexico and Peru says:

> When a man was intoxicated with the native Mexican drink of pulque, a liquor made from the juice of the Agave Americana, he was believed to be under the influence of a god or spirit. The commonest form under which the drink-god was worshipped was the rabbit, that animal being considered to be utterly devoid of sense. . . .The scale of debauchery which it was desired to reach was indicated by the number of rabbits worshipped, the highest number, four hundred, representing the most extreme degree of intoxication.[3]

The rabbit in the corner is Geoffrey's drink-god and when he approaches it, it is in the spirit of some ancient form of worship. The rabbit's convulsion reflects the drunken frenzy of Geoffrey's scene in the barroom and is thus truly an image or "phantom" of himself. The rabbit, ancient symbol of intoxication, is carefully associated by Lowry with the appropriate character in this novel. Similarly, butterflies are carefully associated with Yvonne. Early in the novel, Yvonne recalls "sailing into Acapulco harbor . . . through a hurricane of immense and gorgeous butterflies swooping seaward to greet the Pennsylvannia . . ." (p. 44), and throughout the novel the butterfly recurs to her. The ancient Mexicans had a butterfly god, and Irene Nicholson, in Mexican and Central American Mythology comments on its significance:

> Butterflies, born out of the caterpillar in the chrysalis, were also a symbol of rebirth and regeneration, of happiness and joy.[4]

Yvonne, the character in the novel who returns with the promise of rebirth for Geoffrey and who is most concerned with escaping to Canada to find rebirth, is the appropriate character to be associated with butterflies.

Another mythological motif which comments upon the nature of these two characters is the Mayan calendar referred to in an early conversation between Geoffrey and Yvonne. When Geoffrey and Yvonne discuss their favorite Mayan months, they are in effect contributing to a complex pattern of images and symbols by which the author characterizes them. That is, Yvonne's flower is the bougainvillea; her bird is the Common Red Cardinal; her insect is the butterfly and her favorite Mayan month is "Mac." As Geoffrey recites the names: Pop, Uo, Zip, Zotz, Tzec, Xul, and Yaxkin (p. 82) as the names of Mayan months and chooses his favorite one, Yvonne laughs and remembers the name Mac, in effect choosing it as her favorite, and consequently delivering herself a bitterly ironic comment. Mac was a fertility month to the ancient Mayans and the festivals in this month, as described in Mexican Archaeology by Thomas A. Joyce, involved a fertility ritual.

> Mac. A ceremony was held by those more advanced in life to the Chac, fertility gods, associated with Itzamna. A large fire was lit in the temple court, into which were cast the hearts of various animal sacrifices, lions, tigers and crocodiles. If animals of this size could not be obtained, imitation hearts, formed of copal, were offered instead. The Chac priests then quenched the

> fire with water, a ceremony which, by imitative magic, was supposed to ensure good rainfall.[5]

It is ironic that Yvonne should choose the fertility month, a symbol representing the reverse of her own true nature. True to his nature, however, Geoffrey chooses Uayeb, the five days left over at the end of the calendar and considered to be extremely unlucky. Both the Mayans and the Aztecs had these five extra days and regarded them as unfortunate days. "No work was done, and the people went out as little as possible, for an evil omen encountered during this period was regarded as doubly unlucky. In particular every attempt was made to avoid quarrelling and dispute, and the time was one of general inaction."[6] The atmosphere of danger surrounding these five days perfectly suits the self-destructive character of Geoffrey and his destiny. Thus the references to the Mayan months are indeed functional as mythological motifs which contribute to certain patterns of characterization.

Colors were symbolic to the ancients and are still used symbolically in the peasant weaves of today's Mexicans. From this, certain suggestions may have been made to Lowry for the use of color in Under the Volcano. Irene Nicholson records the following color system for the Mayans:

> black represent[s] war weapons because it is the color of obsidian; yellow, maize or food; red, for obvious reasons, blood; and blue, sacrifice. Green is a symbol of royalty because the green quetzal feathers were the insignia of kings.[7]

One of the most interesting uses of color in Under the Volcano

is in connection with Yvonne. She arrives in a "smart slate blue travelling suit" (p. 72), changes into "yellow slacks" (p. 95) and a blouse embroidered with "birds and flowers and pyramids" (p. 97) to work in the garden, and changes again into a white sharkskin suit with a "brilliant high necked blouse," red shoes, and a "bright red bag" (p. 187) for their afternoon expedition. Her arrival back in Quauhnahuac is a kind of self-sacrifice, at least a sacrifice of her own pride, in an offering of renewed hope for her shattered relationship with Geoffrey, so it is appropriate that she should wear blue at this time. In the garden, her potential as a female fertility figure is heightened by her yellow slacks and her blouse with its symbols of life and permanence. Hugh notes her yellow slacks, the fact that she appeared to be "clothed entirely in sunlight" (p. 95) and the fact that "her breasts stood up under her blouse" (p. 97), all details which contribute to her image as a fertility figure. But when she changes into her red outfit, the association changes drastically to one of blood, sex, and death. Irene Nicholson comments further on the significance of red:

> Throughout ancient Mexico and Central America the color red was associated with death or mourning. Bones were sometimes painted red, and tombs were frequently stained with a brick-colored dye.[8]

In another place, she also comments on red as "the Aztec symbol of sex."[9] Yvonne's associations with sex and death are significant in view of her own death and the death of Geoffrey, caused in part by her own sexual problems. Her

associations with both fertility and death through yellow and red are not unlike those surrounding typical female deities in Mexican myth. It is not unusual to find nature's cruel and evil forces paradoxically combined with the great earth mother qualities and personified in a female deity. In an early drawing of Tlácolteutl, Irene Nicholson points out that "like earth and fertility goddesses everywhere, [she] has many of the aspects of a witch."[10]

Another interesting use of color is in Geoffrey's death vision where he sees "the shape of Popocatepetl, plumed with emerald snow and drenched with brilliance" (p. 373). The green plume is obviously a reference to the royal feathers of the quetzal bird, most often associated in Mexican myth with their greatest hero, Quetzalcoatl, or the plumed serpent. Lowry's reference to the myth is indeed subtle, a good deal more so than that of D.H. Lawrence who earlier popularized Quetzalcoatl in his novel The Plumed Serpent. Lowry alludes to the myth only at the highest point of his novel, the death of his hero, so it is thus important to understand the death of that other hero, Quetzalcoatl. Irene Nicholson comments on the death of Quetzalcoatl.

> It is a universal tragedy that we know so little of this great religious leader, Quetzalcoatl-Kukulcan-Votan, plumed serpent, quetzal bird, Venus and sun god, who sacrificed himself that true manhood might be created in the hemisphere of the west.[11]

But the important fact in terms of Under the Volcano is that his "self-sacrifice saves the universe from extinction

and opens up latent possibilities not only for the heavenly bodies but also for man."[12] The green plume of Quetzalcoatl appears significantly in the final pages of the novel to relate the death of Geoffrey Firmin to the death of Mexico's greatest hero and leader.

Out of the entire pantheon of Mexican gods, the only one called by name in Under the Volcano is Huracán, and references to him are made by Geoffrey. Laruelle remembers Geoffrey having spoken to him "about the spirit of the abyss, the god of storm, "huracán", that testified so suggestively to intercourse between opposite sides of the Atlantic" (p. 16), and Geoffrey himself elaborates to Hugh and Yvonne his east-west associations between "the Vedic storm god Yindra" and Huracán "known to the ancient Mexicans" (p. 257). In a novel so concerned with the sterility-fertility theme, and one that ends in a colossal storm with "lightning flashing like an inchworm going down the sky" and "thunderclaps crashing on the mountains" (p. 373), it is fitting to have Huracán as the governing deity. According to Lewis Spence, Huracán was the Kiche (A Maya people in Guatemala) god of the lightning flash, the thunderbolt, and the thunder. He was also the prototype of Tlaloc, the Mexican god of rain or waters.[13] As such he was responsible for the fertility of the land and the production of grains and fruit. Maidens and children were annually sacrificed to him and "if the children wept it was regarded as a happy omen for a rainy season."[14] Huracán's presence in the final scene

of the novel in the form of thunder, lightning, and rain adds another positive note to the sacrifice of Geoffrey, just as does the presence of Quetzalcoatl's emerald plume in Geoffrey's death vision. Geoffrey's death is in the spirit of the ancient rites of his death place, Mexico.

It is thus important that Geoffrey's death takes place in Mexico, but it is also significant in terms of ancient mythology that it takes place at a specific site in Mexico. The early Zapotec Indians, in the area of Oaxaca had an actual city to which the souls of all their dead went. The ruins of this city still exist at Mitla, a short distance from the city of Oaxaca, a city which combined with Cuernavaca in the founding of Lowry's fictional Quauhnahuac. Mythologically, Lowry chose the ideal location for the death of his hero when he made his destination a short bus trip and a short walk from Quauhnahuac: The city of Mitla was important to both early peoples and to some present day Indians according to two writers about Mexico, a fact which Lowry would undoubtedly have been aware of too. N.O. Winter in Mexico and Her People of Today quotes an early Spanish writer who wrote

> We passed through a pueblo which is called Mictlan, signifying "hell" in the native tongue, where were found some edifices more worth seeing than anything else in New Spain.[15]

George Woodcock in To the City of the Dead comments further:

> To the Zapotecs, Mitla is still the center of the world--mitad del mundo--and the city of souls. Here the ancient Zapotec kings of the valley are said to have been buried, and here all good members of the tribe are still believed

> to gather after they die, in a vast underground city below the ruins, where they live a shadowy existence like the Greeks in Hades.[16]

So Geoffrey's journey takes him to the most fitting mythological site for his sacrificial death.

Mexican mythology also served Malcolm Lowry in a larger way, that is, in structuring the whole novel. The Day of the Dead is the chief feature of the Mexican setting and of Mexican mythology which forms a structural framework for Under the Volcano. Although we see the modern day celebration of the festival in the novel, the roots of the celebration began in very early Mexican cultures and spread down through the centuries. Having set the action of the novel on this peculiar day, a merry festival day in Mexico, Lowry obtained one self-made structure for his tale, the ritual festivities which are carried on throughout the day. The celebrations of the holiday follow a ritual pattern or order which builds to a climax at night, a pattern which allows Lowry to develop his story in correspondence with the day. Due to the cyclical nature of his story, the atmosphere of climax occurs in the first chapter as well as in the last chapters, since Laruelle's part of the narrative takes place on the night of the Day of the Dead a year later than the action of the main narrative. In the first chapter, the descriptions of the night festival in all its grotesque detail prefigure and match closely the descriptions in the final chapters. The morning and afternoon of the Day of the Dead are spent in elaborate preparation for the evening festivities and in travelling to the cemeteries. But in the evening the

celebration reaches its height when the mourners gather in the cemetery for their all night vigil and to make their offerings of flowers, food, and drink to the dead. In the first chapter, "the tintinnabulation of the mourners--as of singing, rising and falling, and a steady tramping" (p. 4), as well as, fine details like "a somber pillar advancing bearing a tray of chocolate skulls" (p. 27) prepare us for the night scene, a year earlier, but which comes in the final chapters of the novel.

Throughout most of the novel, the activities of the main characters correspond to the activities of the Mexican celebrants. For example, in the morning as Yvonne and Geoffrey wend their way quietly home to rest, Yvonne notes the deserted decorated streets expectantly awaiting the forthcoming activity. There is an ominous tone in the ponderous silence of:

> The fiesta wouldn't start till much later and the streets that remembered so many other Days of the Dead were fairly deserted. The bright banners, the paper streamers, flashed: the great wheel brooded under the trees, brilliant, motionless (p. 52).

The relationship of Geoffrey and Yvonne is at a similar stage of inquietude; some intense activity must follow if their situation is to be resolved. Later in the afternoon, as they move toward some kind of resolution, their movement takes the form of a bus journey, just as the celebrants too travel on the bus to the site of the festival. The afternoon possesses a certain amount of gaiety, in honor of the holiday, so that even the bus tickets wink "with their bright

colors" and the bus goes faster than it has ever gone because it too knows about the holiday (p. 250). The same atmosphere of gaiety is present at the bullthrowing as a kind of camouflage for the truth of reality. Yvonne sees the Mexicans and their celebration as:

> What a wonderful time everybody was having, how happy they were, how happy everyone was! How merrily Mexico laughed away its tragic history, the past, the underlying death! (p. 254).

The journey of the Firmins and their drinking is a camouflage too, for the reality that only Geoffrey can face in the end. And the end or the climaxing realization comes at the apex of the festival where the description of the increased tempo of the festivities concentrates more on the death objects and symbols than on the mere party. In the last pages there is an increasing number of references to the activities of the Mexicans with their chants and candles (p. 323), their chocolate skulls and skeletons (p. 338), their long black cloaks streaked with luminous paint to represent skeletons (p. 359), and their clock work skeletons that dance jigs on the bar (p. 368). Geoffrey's realization of the truth that it is death that he desires, comes at a special point in time, a point when the whole countryside is literally filled with images and symbols of death due to an annual event which has been celebrated in Mexico since earliest times. All of the customs of Aztec human sacrifice, minus the actual sacrifice, have been maintained in Mexico for centuries. Geoffrey adds the missing element to the age old ritual with his own personal sacrifice, and the ceremony

of the Day of the Dead is complete.

Although the Day of the Dead is the chief structural feature, other aspects of Indian thought also lend to the structure of the novel. One key legend called the "Legend of the Suns" seems to be woven into the novel. The Mayans held a "great cyclical concept" of time and they "envisaged an end when creation would return to its beginnings."[17] For them "all moons, all years, all days, all winds, reach their completion and pass away" just as the four previous eras of legend passed away.[18] According to them, "there were four eras known as 'suns' before our own" and "all ended in cataclysm."[19] The legend describes how earth, air, fire, and water came together to form the fifth sun, the one in which we are now supposed to be living, but it also predicts that this era will end in earthquakes.[20] Under the Volcano embodies this legend with its cyclical ordering of time, and its cataclysmic ending. At first Geoffrey sees the end as a volcano in eruption but then "no it wasn't the volcano, the world itself was bursting, bursting into black spouts of villages catapulted into space . . ." (p. 375). Thus for Geoffrey the fifth era ends in volcanoes and earthquakes exactly as prophesied by the old legend.

By far the most important function of Mexican myth in Under the Volcano is its role at the very heart of the novel. That is, the essence of ancient myth informs the subject of the novel. John White's study Mythology in the Modern Novel suggests this fact when he says:

> We have, however, no reason to suppose that a work of literature is necessarily constructed to create or resuscitate myth, just because it includes mythological motifs. This in turn does not mean that certain writers may not at times have been seeking to create a new myth out of old ones. Joyce's Finnegans Wake and Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano have this mythical quality.[21]

Lowry's new myth arises out of the old myths of Mexico. Central to all Mexican myth in its attempt to explain the cosmos or the vital questions of man's life and death is a highly unique attitude toward death. Central to Under the Volcano is the question of Geoffrey's death and one's attitude toward it. Since the moment of the greatest dramatic import in the novel is the death of Geoffrey, it seems that death is the main subject of the novel. And Mexican myth and its remnants in modern day Mexico have a great deal to say by way of interpreting death.

A unique attitude toward death is manifest in modern day Mexico. Although modern day Mexicans no longer make human sacrifices on the Day of the Dead, they have inherited much of the original attitude toward death. Erna Fergusson in Fiesta in Mexico describes this vividly:

> Mexico is probably the only country in the world where a person may look forward with some pleasure to his own death, his own funeral, his own grave. Certainly it is the only one where it is reasonable to anticipate a bright blue coffin painted with winged cherubs, a funeral enlivened with dance tunes, and a grave on which family and friends will picnic gayly every year.[22]

The meaning and significance of death to this society is mirrored in their celebration of the Day of the Dead, and Lowry presents many images of the ritual to indicate this.

For example, there is the image of A Few Fleas who "went on reading . . . muttering, cramming himself with chocolate skulls bought for the Day of the Dead, chocolate skeletons, chocolate, yes, funeral wagons" (p. 338). There seems to be little religious significance attached to death, merely an acceptance of death as one of the inevitable facts of life. But Lowry also mixes images of real or actual death with images of the festival in order to reinforce the startling impression of how death affects the descendants of the Aztecs. The idea of a graveyard celebration is startling, but not as startlingly effective as an actual funeral with a band playing "La Cucaracha." It is easier to reconcile a group of people celebrating some long dead ancestor in a cemetery, than to reconcile a funeral procession of a recently dead child in which "two saxophones, bass guitar," and a fiddle play while part of the procession is "joking" and "straggling along in the dust" (p. 56). Likewise it is difficult to reconcile the young women in mourning on the bus who get out to walk ignoring the dying Indian by the roadside in favor of their plans for "resurrection in the cemetery" (p. 249). Actual death has no real meaning for them; only the ritual celebration of death is important. Another image of the "little church that had been turned into a school with the tombstones and the horizontal bar in the playground" (p. 64), shows how little even the real symbols of death are generally revered. This image somehow makes an even greater impression than that of the chocolate skulls and candy coffins. Another vivid comment upon the Mexicans'

thanatopsis is their saying: "Now then, don't be careful . . . I'm going to shave the back of your neck" (p. 178). All of these images support most forcefully the particular attitude toward death which permeates Mexico past and present and which is so important to Lowry in Under the Volcano.

In order to understand this attitude toward death, it is necessary to know about some of the early myths of Mexico, as well as some of the religious practices of the earliest known peoples. In one myth, two of the leading gods "throw themselves into the flames, seeking death in order to be reborn."[23] The Larousse World Mythology comments upon this act:

> the extraordinary importance of human sacrifice does not spring from purposeless cruelty, but from the most terrible of necessities: that of feeding the sun. Each sacrifice is a continuation of the divine sacrifice.[24]

Then of course, there is the divine sacrifice of Quetzalcoatl, the most powerful figure in all of Mexican mythology. According to one main version of the Quetzalcoatl myth

> the god-man fell from grace and allowed himself to be coaxed into a drunken orgy, during which he had sexual intercourse with his sister. When he recovered, he repented, built his own funeral pyre, and rose to heaven as the planet Venus.[25]

The peoples of ancient America re-enacted the sacrifices of their gods. Irene Nicholson distinguishes between the voluntary sacrifice of life performed by the earliest peoples for the sake of redeeming the world, and the mass murder and tearing out of the hearts of unwilling victims performed by the late Aztecs, a corruption of the original

ideal. She describes in detail this ideal and the ceremony of the "unblemished youth" with the "deified heart."

> The earliest human sacrifices in ancient America were probably voluntary. At one of the most important feasts in the calendar, for instance, that of the god Tezcatlipoca, a single youth was killed apparently with his own consent. This boy was taken to be the earthly image of Tezcatlipoca, and for a year before his death he was made the center of extraordinary reverence, cherished and treated with the greatest respect. He was taught to play the flute, to fetch and carry the reeds and flowers required for offerings. He was taught to hold himself well, to be courteous and gentle of speech. Those who met him kissed the earth and paid him reverential bows. . . .
>
> Twenty days before he was to be sacrificed the keepers changed his clothes for those in which he would end his life. They married him to four virgins who had also received a careful upbringing and who were given the names of four goddesses. Five days before the appointed feast, honor was paid to the youth as to a god, there being much feasting and dance. Finally the youth was placed in a canoe covered with a canopy. With him went his wives, and they sailed away to a place where there was a low hill. Here the wives were abandoned, and now only the eight servants accompanied the youth to a small and poorly equipped temple. Climbing its steps, on the first of them he broke one of the flutes he had played during his year of prosperity and cherishing, on the second he broke another, on the third another, and so on until he reached the highest part of the temple where the priests were assembled waiting to kill him. They stood in pairs. Binding his hands and his head, they laid him face upward on the block. A knife of stone was plunged into his breast. It gouged out his heart which was offered immediately to the Sun.[26]

By way of interpreting this ceremony, Nicholson says:

> The ceremony was a myth acted out in real life. The myth was about a man who must learn to glorify god through sensual things, through fine clothes and music and dance before he is worthy of breaking the senses one by one and losing his life in order to gain it.[27]

The philosophical meaning in both the myth and the practice

is that the worlds of matter and spirit are coexistent and each has something which the other needs, that is, spirit must enter matter to infuse it with life.

Man may strive to attain this spiritual consciousness in various ways. One means is through hallucinogens, which the Mexicans believed to be sacred and god-given. The process of communicating with the deities could be intensified and quickened by the use of drugs distilled from native plants such as toadstools or peyotl. Gods and priests were magicians who practised black magic in an attempt to change the course of things. Geoffrey's reliance on mescal, a particular Mexican intoxicant, links him with magicians and necromancers who practise the ancient rites. His knowledge of the cabbala and alchemy also places him in the role, so much so that Hugh suggests to Yvonne: "Maybe he's a black magician!" (p. 18). Geoffrey shares the pessimism of the early peoples he allies himself with. For the early Mexican and for Geoffrey, the world is condemned, and therefore the real answer is in self-destruction. Following his violent argument with Hugh about books and history, he announces "I love hell. I can't wait to get back there. In fact I'm running, I'm almost back there already" (p. 314), a triumphant affirmation of his belief in self-destruction or suicide. Again he allies himself with the ancients for they too believed in suicide as the ultimate means of attaining spiritual consciousness. Irene Nicholson says that both the Mayas and the Nahuas believed that suicides went to paradise, and she speculates

whether originally the idea of suicide was related to the killing of a man's lower nature to attain spiritual consciousness.[28] The pre-Christian Mexicans did not believe that hell was a place for the punishment of the wicked, rather they believed it was "a necessary point of transition in the circular journey of all created things."[29] In the world of matter, Geoffrey and his protector, the dog, lie at the bottom of the ravine, but together they begin their journey into the world of spirit.

Surrounded by such a rich heritage of beliefs and practices, each immensely preoccupied with death, Geoffrey Firmin found his answer in Mexico--an answer accepted by generations and generations of Mexicans. The spirit of Mexico is the spirit of sacrificial death; only sacrifice can prolong the life of mankind. Geoffrey Firmin understands the deepest essence and seeks the same fulfillment as Quetzalcoatl. He dares to alter the course of his own existence and to initiate a journey to which he is forced only by inner necessity. For this reason Geoffrey belongs to the same band as Quetzalcoatl,

> the same tiny band of the elect who through all ages have preferred freedom to bondage, immortality to imprisonment in passing time, lasting instead of transitory happiness.[30]

Geoffrey Firmin belongs in this group because his creator dared to bridge the gulf that exists between precolumbian and modern thought to make the essence of an ancient myth meaningful to our own day.[31]

V. CONCLUSION

So far, Malcolm Lowry is his own best critic of the importance of the Mexican setting in Under the Volcano. His early defense of the novel, the letter to Jonathan Cape written from Mexico in 1946, draws attention to the Mexican setting and offers some clues for interpretation of its significance. The best critical commentary however, is given in a novel he left incomplete but which has been recently published by his wife and Douglas Day. Although Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid has been called "incomplete," "provisional," and "literary solipsism"[1] in its unsuccessful debut with the critics, it does furnish valuable critical commentary on the author's earlier magnificent work Under the Volcano. The return to the same setting and a less symbolic use of that setting indicates a fascination with its significance, as well as, almost a despair that others have failed to comprehend the first novel's intentions in its use of the Mexican setting.

In the Cape Letter, Lowry denies the "heaping on" of "local color" in "shovelfuls," claiming rather that "all is there for a reason."[2] Besides his explanation of the simple aspects of the novel in statements like: "Almost everything in it is relevant even down to the horses, the dogs, the river, and the small talk about the local movie,"[3] he also strikes the central paradox of the novel in: "Mexico . . . It is paradisal: it is unquestionably infernal."[4] The

ultimate meaning of Mexico, the awareness of beauty in destruction or the glorification of death, and its effect upon the Consul can be extended to the universal level. Mexico is a universal symbol for Lowry, or as he says: " . . . what profundity and final meaning there is in his [the Consul's] fate should be seen also in its universal relationship to the ultimate fate of mankind."5

This relationship between the Consul's fate and the ultimate fate of mankind is further explored in Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid. Not only does this novel explain many of the Mexican symbols of the first novel, but it also exposes the final and profound meaning of Under the Volcano in a literal and straightforward way. As an example of this first function, an explanation is given for the meaning of the vultures and dogs. The role of the vultures is tantalizingly spelled out in a conversation between Sigbjørn and Primrose; and the role of the dog is explicitly indicated by a Mexican tour guide who shows the tombs of the Oaxaqueñan region to the writer and his wife. When Primrose first observes the vultures she says, "Oh Sigbjørn, your xopilotes!" and Sigbjørn thinks in reference to his novel: " . . . the Promethean creatures were supposed to play a part perhaps a shade less obvious than in every other book about war or Mexico or death." In reply then, he says: "You should say, 'Oh darling, our first vultures!'"6 --the affection and endearment of the statement being indicative of the paradoxical beauty of the death birds which is developed so consciously in the first novel. More explicitly,

of course, the tour guide's explanation of the dog bones found in ancient tombs associates Geoffrey's death with the deaths of Mexico's ancients:

> But the guide was saying . . . The Mexicans believed that in the journey taken by the spirit in the realm of the dead there came a time when a wide river difficult to cross was reached. For this reason they killed a dog to accompany his master on the last journey. The spirit of the dog was supposed to reach the far side of the river in advance of the man, and upon seeing his master would jump into the water and help him across. This startled Sigbjørn, for it tallied so closely with The Valley. Something to think of at night.[7]

The compulsion of the artist to explain his symbols, particularly his death symbols in their unique aspects to an uncomprehending audience is evident in Sigbjørn's thoughts about Tomalin and Parian:

> The point that each of these places had long occupied in his mind as a symbol of some chamber or niche of the human spirit was doubtless, to most people, even to Primrose, incommunicable; such thoughts being akin to those that trouble the dead rather than the living.[8]

In most cases the meaning of Mexico is too literally spelled out for Dark as the Grave to be an artistic success, but nevertheless, both at the simple level of the narrative concerning the lives of Sigbjørn and Primrose, and at the more complex symbolic level where the Mexican landscape is imperfectly metamorphosed, the novel serves as valuable commentary on the use of Mexico in Under the Volcano. Although the two novels diverge dramatically in their endings with Geoffrey plunging to a violent and destructive death while Sigbjørn rises happy and glad to be alive, the fact is, Mexico remains the same as always, its spirit

encompassing both the negative and the positive, the destructive and the constructive, a fact recognized in both novels. The same immense sense of the weight of Mexico's past and the vast millenniums of history so carefully created in Under the Volcano are recognized simply in Sigbjørn's thoughts.

> . . . far far beneath these peaks of volcanoes and fabulous summits, far far below Mexico was still there, without doubt, largely unchanged, had been there all this time, carrying on without him. . . .[9]

The paradox that Mexico represents, that out of destruction comes construction, is seen simply in the life of Sigbjørn when he contemplates the decision he once made to separate from his first wife in the Hotel Cornada.

> The Hotel Cornada had been, of course, a place of decision, the scene perhaps of the most purely destructive and negative decision he had ever made in his life unless since had he not made it he might never have met Primrose and certainly would never have written The Valley of the Shadow of Death, it was the most ruthlessly constructive and positive one.[10]

Out of a negative decision was produced a work of art and a new life with a different individual. This same paradox is represented symbolically for the characters in a Mexican landscape symbol.

> On their way back from the El Petate, they got lost and found themselves in the Via Dolorosa, a transverse street, that looked precisely the same whether you looked up or down it.[11]

In one direction lies the disaster of our lives and in the other lies triumph, but both are essentially the same for Sigbjørn, for Geoffrey, for the Aztecs and all

early Mexican peoples, and for universal mankind. Life continues. Thus, in destruction and sacrifice there is the hope of resurrection and rebirth. Sigbjørn's realization of the universal application of this principle explains both Lowry's use of Spengler's theory of the decline of western civilization, and his symbolic use of Mexican geography, history, and mythology in Under the Volcano.

> Suddenly it struck Sigbjorn that perhaps they were not there for no reason at all, that this was a landscape, so to say, to which they did bear only too pointed a relation: but if this gave one cause for despair, what conceit was it drove man to such extremes as postulating the end of our civilization as almost the end of our world, or even "the end of the world" as the "end of life"?[12]

Geoffrey Firmin's fate is the fate of western civilization; decline and destruction are inevitable, but as is seen in the gigantic symbol of Mexico--life goes on.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

1 Malcolm Lowry, "Preface to a Novel," Malcolm Lowry: The Man and His Work, ed. George Woodcock, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1971), p. 13.

2 Ibid., p. 12.

3 Waldo Frank, America Hispana (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), p. xv.

4 Malcolm Lowry, Under the Volcano (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1947), p. 238. All subsequent references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

5 William H. Prescott, History of the Conquest of Mexico (London: Swan Sonnenschein, Lowrey, & Co., 1888), p. 189.

6 Prescott, p. 287.

7 Frank, p. 231.

8 Frank, p. 216.

9 Frank, p. 216.

10 Frank, p. 216.

11 Frank, p. 225.

12 Frank, p. 226.

13 William McConnell, "Recollections of Malcolm Lowry," Malcolm Lowry: The Man and His Work, ed. George Woodcock, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1971), p. 156.

14 Lowry, "Preface to a Novel," p. 12.

CHAPTER II. GEOGRAPHY: THE PHYSICAL FEATURES

1 William H. Prescott, History of the Conquest of Mexico (London: Swan Sonnenschein, Lowrey & Co., 1888), p. 484.

2 Prescott, p. 484.

3 Daniel B. Dodson, Malcolm Lowry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 26.

4 Richard Hauer Costa, Malcolm Lowry (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1972), p. 163.

5 Prescott, p. 235.

6 Prescott, p. 300.

7 Waldo Frank, America Hispana (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), p. 230.

8 W.J. Turner, The Hunter and Other Poems (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, Ltd., 1916), p. 9.

9 Prescott, p. 251.

10 Satis N. Coleman, Volcanoes New and Old (New York: The John Day Co., 1946), p. 103.

11 This is noted as an "obvious parallel" by William H. New in Malcolm Lowry (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1971), p. 38.

12 Quoted from Lowry's typescript novel La Mordida by William H. New in Malcolm Lowry (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1971), p. 56.

CHAPTER II. GEOGRAPHY: FLORA AND FAUNA

1 Hilda Thomas, "Lowry's Letters," Malcolm Lowry: The Man and His Work, ed. George Woodcock, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1971), p. 109.

2 Ibid., p. 109.

3 William H. Prescott, History of the Conquest of Mexico (London: Swan Sonnenschein, Lowrey & Co., 1888), p. 296.

4 Waldo Frank, America Hispana (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), p. 230.

5 Lewis Spence, The Myths of Mexico and Peru (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1913), p. 100.

6 Frank, p. 226.

7 M. Walter Pesman, Meet Flora Mexicana (Globe, Arizona: Dale Stuart King, 1962), p. 253.

8 Malcolm Lowry, Under the Volcano First Novel Version (B) (Unpublished manuscript, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia), Chapter 12, p. 32.

9 Pesman, p. 201.

10 Pesman, p. 155.

11 Frank, p. 207.

12 Hans Hvass, Birds of the World (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1963), p. 94.

13 Hvass, p. 94.

14 J. Hanzak, The Pictorial Encyclopedia of Birds (New York: Crown Publisher's Inc., 1967), p. 383.

15 Lowry, Under the Volcano First Novel Version (B) Chapter VI, p. [illegible].

16 Hvass, p. 94.

17 Lowry, Under the Volcano First Novel Version (B) Chapter VI, p. 25.

18 Frank, p. 215.

19 Frank, p. 214.

20 Daniel B. Dodson, Malcolm Lowry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 27.

21 Dodson, p. 28.

22 Beryl Miles, Spirit of Mexico (London: John Murray, 1961), p. 49.

23 Miles, p. 49.

24 H. Starker Leopold, Wildlife of Mexico (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1959), p. 339.

25 Perle S. Epstein, The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. 67.

26 Dodson, p. 27.

27 Prescott, p. 136.

28 Prescott, p. 597.

29 Pierre Grimal, ed., Larousse World Mythology (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1965), p. 469.

[30] Frank, p. 213.

[31] Spence, p. 73.

[32] Spence, p. 73.

[33] Spence, p. 74.

[34] Frank Cowan, Curious Facts in the History of Insects (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1865), p. 328.

[35] Miles, p. 21.

[36] Miles, p. 3.

[37] Miles, p. 128.

[38] Miles, p. 34.

[39] Miles, p. 113.

[40] Miles, p. 149.

[41] Miles, p. 48.

[42] Miles, pp. 49-50.

[43] Miles, p. 50.

[44] Robert B. Heilman, "The Possessed Artist and the Ailing Soul," Malcolm Lowry: The Man and His Work, ed. George Woodcock, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1971), p. 25.

CHAPTER III. HISTORY

[1] Anthony Kilgallin, "Faust and Under the Volcano" Canadian Literature, No. 26 (1965), pp. 43-54. Kilgallin calls Spengler "an important functional reference throughout Under the Volcano."

[2] Oswald Spengler, The Decline of the West (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1927), p. 50.

[3] Spengler, p. 18.

[4] Spengler, p. 34.

[5] Spengler, p. 18.

[6] Spengler, p. 3.

[7] Spengler, p. 3.

[8] Spengler, p. 7.

[9] Spengler, p. 8.

[10] Spengler, p. 21.

[11] Spengler, p. 25.

[12] Spengler, p. 40.

[13] Spengler, p. 40.

[14] Irene Nicholson, Mexican and Central American Mythology (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1967), p. 18.

[15] Spengler, p. 47.

[16] Nicholson, p. 44.

[17] Richard Hauer Costa, Malcolm Lowry (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1972), p. 63.

[18] Spengler, p. 159.

[19] William H. Prescott, History of the Conquest of Mexico (London: Swan Sonnenschein, Lowrey & Co., 1888), p. 562.

[20] Prescott, p. 503.

[21] Prescott, p. 387.

[22] Prescott, p. 24.

[23] Another view of Tlaxcala is found in Perle S. Epstein, The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. 167. Epstein capitalizes on the "Tlaxcala refrain" and its significance to the black magic theme. Tlaxcala was a center for black magic.

[24] Prescott, p. 225.

[25] John W. Snyder, Alexander the Great (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1966), p. 153.

[26] Pauline R. Kibbe, A Guide to Mexican History (Mexico City: Minutiae Mexicana, 1968), p. 51.

[27] Joseph H.L. Schlarman, Mexico: A Land of Volcanoes (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1951), p. 362.

[28] Costa, p. 73.

[29] Quoted in Costa, p. 73.

[30] Kibbe, p. 53.

[31] Schlarman, p. 303.

[32] Schlarman, p. 304.

[33] Kibbe, p. 53.

[34] Kibbe, p. 55.

[35] Schlarman, p. 388.

[36] Kibbe, p. 64.

[37] Schlarman, p. 411.

[38] Schlarman, p. 545.

[39] Schlarman, p. 568.

CHAPTER IV. MYTHOLOGY

[1] John White, Mythology and the Modern Novel (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 16.

[2] Pierre Grimal, ed., Larousse World Mythology (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1965), p. 467.

[3] Lewis Spence, The Myths of Mexico and Peru (1913; rpt. London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1920), p. 104.

[4] Irene Nicholson, Mexican and Central American Mythology (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1967), p. 40.

[5] Thomas A Joyce, Mexican Archaeology (1914; rpt. New York: Hacker Art Books, 1970), p. 269.

[6] Joyce, p. 72.

[7] Nicholson, p. 22.

[8] Nicholson, p. 22.

[9] Nicholson, p. 113.

[10] Nicholson, p. 113.

[11] Nicholson, p. 136.

[13] Nicholson, p. 75.

[14] Spence, p. 76.

[15] Spence, p. 76.

[16] N.O. Winter, Mexico and Her People Today (Boston: L.C. Page & Co., 1912), p. 155.

[17] George Woodcock, To the City of the Dead (London: Faber & Faber, 1957), p. 262.

[18] Nicholson, p. 20.

[19] Nicholson, p. 21.

[20] Larousse World Mythology, p. 462.

[21] Larousse World Mythology, p. 462.

[22] John White, p. 8 and 8n.

[23] Erna Fergusson, Fiesta in Mexico (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1942), p. 199.

[24] Larousse World Mythology, p. 468.

[25] Larousse World Mythology, p. 467.

[26] Nicholson, p. 85.

[27] Nicholson, pp. 73-74.

[28] Nicholson, p. 74.

[29] Nicholson, p. 122.

[30] Nicholson, p. 24.

[31] Nicholson, p. 91.

[32] It is obvious that Lowry's knowledge of Mexican mythology extended deeper than I have acknowledged here. For example, Dr. R.A. Young of the Department of Romance Languages at the University of Alberta has pointed out to me Lowry's possible use of Spanish manuscripts such as Anales de Cuanhtitlán, a document from Aztec Mexico which includes the Leyenda de los soles. In addition, the Mexican concept of "nahualismo" strengthens the many associations Lowry makes between the human world and the natural world, as for example between Geoffrey and the rabbit.

CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION

[1] George Woodcock, "Art as the Writer's Mirror," Malcolm Lowry: The Man and His Work, ed. George Woodcock, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1971), pp. 66-70.

[2] Malcolm Lowry, The Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry, ed. Harvey Breit and Margerie Bonner Lowry, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), p. 61. Hereafter cited as Selected Letters.

[3] Lowry, Selected Letters, p. 73.

[4] Lowry, Selected Letters, p. 67.

[5] Lowry, Selected Letters, p. 66.

[6] Malcolm Lowry, Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid (1968; rpt. New York and Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., 1969), p. 68. Hereafter cited as Dark as the Grave.

[7] Lowry, Dark as the Grave, p. 227.

[8] Lowry, Dark as the Grave, p. 196.

[9] Lowry, Dark as the Grave, p. 70.

[10] Lowry, Dark as the Grave, p. 77.

[11] Lowry, Dark as the Grave, p. 87.

[12] Lowry, Dark as the Grave, p. 248.

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